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JOHN GLYNN

A Novel of Social Work

BY

ARTHUR PATERSON

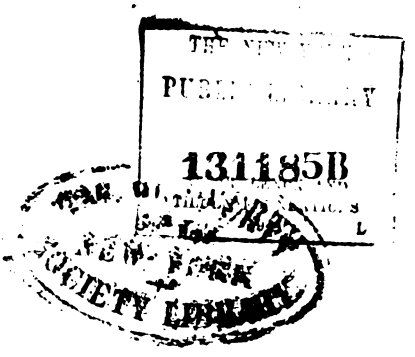
AUTHOR OF "A SON OF THE PLAINS," "THE KING'S AGENT," "CROMWELL'S OWN," "THE HOMES OF TENNYSON," ETC.



NEW YORK

HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

1907



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Published April, 1907

THE QUINN & BODEN CO. PRESS
RAHWAY, N. J.



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DEDICATED
BY PERMISSION TO
HER ROYAL HIGHNESS
THE PRINCESS OF WALES



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JOHN GLYNN



JOHN GLYNN

CHAPTER I

THE CONTRACT

In modest bachelor quarters in the suburb of Hampstead two men were talking of old times. Outside a North wind was whirling up and down the streets light drifts of snow, which melted when they touched the pavement, but gave enough of wintriness to the atmosphere to make a blazing fire and well-drawn curtains eminently desirable within doors.

It was a comfortable room with big armchairs and a table, which, contrary to most tables in "digs," stood squarely on its four feet and never wriggled. At this time in the evening it was generally covered with writing materials, for the occupier of the room had literary ambitions, but to-night it was graced with ornaments of another kind—a decanter of whiskey, glasses, and a syphon of soda-water.

In one of the armchairs a man lay at full length, smoking a battered meerschaum pipe. His companion stood with his back to the fire, swaying from side to side, as if on the deck of a ship, and talking fast. When the spirit moved him —a very restless spirit—he would take a turn up and down the room and lean against the table, to the great danger of the articles there.

"I tell you, John," he said, leaving his place by the fire; "you are the most unaccountable cuss, the most enigmatical person that ever came out of the Rocky Mountains."

He emphasised his remark by sitting down on the table with a jerk which sent an ink-pot spinning and made the glasses jump.

"Prove it," rejoined the other man, darting out a long arm and deftly catching the ink-pot in time to prevent its contents from being emptied over the cloth.

His companion took no notice of the accident, being wholly absorbed in his argument.

"I will prove it to the hilt. You, a bloated Western millionaire—don't interrupt—£100,000 was it? That's good enough for me. You a rich man, with one fortune in your hands and a dozen in prospect, if you remain out West, throw up the life you have lived ten years, plump down in these old digs of mine, and tell me you have come home—to stay!"

"That's so."

"That's so, is it? Then what, in all seriousness and in the name of all that's unmentionable, do you mean by it?"

"Business—and you, boy Brabant."

The other gave a gleeful laugh.

"The old name. How good it is to hear it from your lips. I feel five years younger. This old room," waving his pipe round his head, "is the camp house on Baldy mountain. I am going on the herd in a minute on the old bay pony, to be all night long riding in the rain; and you, you, smoking placidly as you always did when things were most lively, are waiting while the boys saddle up to go forth and corral that last brace of horse-thieves whom you will hang in the cotton woods before sunrise. Ah, me! John, the days when we were young."

"Five years is not a lifetime."

Dick Brabant sighed.

"That depends, old man, on what happens in five years."

He left the table and lay back full length in the other armchair, his animation all gone, his hands drooping listlessly at his side, his pipe gone out.

The chair at the other side creaked heavily, though it was the strongest in the room, as the brown-faced man sat up, and, leaning forward, laid a hand upon Dick's knee. He did not speak, but Dick grasped the hand, and they sat there for several minutes watching the fire.

After a time John Glynn drew his hand away and slowly filled his pipe again.

"Business and you, I said. The matter is very simple. Cattle raising has been played out since the Companies and Trusts took hold, and I have been watching a chance to sell for a year past. It came suddenly and I had no time to write you till all was over. Then I came home. I believe the States will be the commercial centre of the world—but I am not an American, and I am not a commercial man. My pile is enough for me—and so I have come to the old country to play. There is nothing unaccountable about that."

"Nothing whatever," Dick retorted. "Only as it happens it is not the truth. Play! You couldn't if you tried. Who cleaned out Colchas City—that nest of gambling hells and worse; who swept it, holy-stoned it,—polished it until no card-sharper or any other tough could live within a hundred miles of it?—why you—in your play-time, the winter, while we cowboys kicked our heels. And the training you went through beforehand to do it. The month you spent in New York near the Bowery, boarding with the champion prize-fighter, boxing day and night. Never shall I forget the bruises on your face when you came back. Play be hanged! It's not in you to play, 'Granite Glynn.' You intend to work at something—what? We have no saloon bosses, or horse-thieves or road agents. We are a dull, peaceful, slow-paced old country crowd. So as I said before——"

But here John Glynn burst into a hearty laugh.

"Five years have not changed you much, boy Brabant. Upon my word I think you can look more innocent than ever, you rattlesnake."

Dick solemnly turned up his eyes.

"What I have said, sir, is true as——"

"What have you left out?"

"Nothing of any importance."

"Friend, thou art a liar."

Dick gave a low laugh and began to fill his pipe with excited fingers.

"I have left out one thing only: the screeds I wrote you about 'Social work'; the books I sent you written by my chief. John, put me out of my suspense. You have not come back to work with me—for the Society."

"What is your idea?"

"It is too good to be true."

"It is true."

Dick Brabant leapt to his feet with a wild cheer, and banged the table with his fist.

"My dear old fellow," he panted, "it is just magnificent."

John Glynn shrugged his shoulders. He was standing before the fire now, frowning, with a far-away look in his eyes.

"I will tell you," he said slowly, "how I look at it." He paused, while Dick threw himself back in his chair and with eyes half closed observed him narrowly.

John Glynn was a man of powerful physique. He stood six feet two inches, and had a massive chest and shoulders, and limbs of exceptional power, yet it was not his size which had made him remarkable in a land where the conditions of life and society produce strong men. It was the compactness and completeness of his strength. Though he weighed fourteen stone his step was as light as a girl's, and he could jump nearly his own height. At football when a lad he was a reckless player, and had many a heavy fall, but he had never been hurt. Out West he had ridden after cattle eighty miles a day, yet had never given his horse a sore back. He was one of those men who seem to be made in equal parts of india-rubber and steel.

His face was as compact as the rest of him; but Western life, and a temperament which he had found harder to subdue than all other difficulties put together, had left deep traces. John Glynn was thirty-two, and looked forty. His brown hair, though plentiful enough, still was touched with grey. His eyes, honest and kindly, were sad, as though he endured rather than enjoyed life; and his mouth, expressive in younger days of that pleasant toleration and good-humour which a strong man feels for a world he has never feared

nor favoured, was stern now, and when the lips closed above the broad, square chin, inflexible.

Dick Brabant, by nature and training a keen observer, and knowing this man as no other knew him, smiled contentedly to himself.

"I know," he murmured, "I know well, my friend, what you will do."

Then John spoke and Dick listened.

"I know nothing about this business which you call charity," John said, speaking very slowly. "But as I read the books and papers you sent out it came to me, bit by bit, that I should like to try my hand at the work Edward Brooke, the secretary of your society, writes about. He preaches the gospel, if I understand him aright, that self-help is the bed-rock of citizenship, and that those who have a bad time, whether it be through their own fault, lack of opportunity, or sheer misfortune, can only be helped if they are taken by both hands and lifted clear of the mud, where they can help themselves. He will have nothing to do with the charitymongers who give away other people's bread in order to butter their own. He has no use for those who give money they do not want to folk they know nothing about. But he holds that every man, rich or poor, busy or idle, should give away part of himself. That is what I want to do, if I can. I do not know how I am to do it. I expect you to tell me that. But if you can find me a corner to work in, and show me something I am able to do, I will take hold and help you right away."

He stood still while he talked—a great contrast to his friend, who was never still a moment; and now, when he stopped, he thrust his hands into his pockets and leant back against the mantelpiece, looking into Dick Brabant's eager face.

Dick gave a quick sigh.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "but this is wonderful! Perfectly wonderful, John! What the old people call providential! It is, indeed."

He looked on his friend with a quaint mixture of affec-

tion, respect, and proprietorship. "You want a corner, you say, where you can work and begin at once. Why, there is one ready—the very one to fit you—where you can do more than any other living man, though when I tell you where it is"—he made a grimace—"I don't know quite what you will say."

"Tell me."

"Well, we do our work in districts all over London, and in each is an office, where the secretary, who is responsible for carrying things through in his or her neighbourhood, works all day long. Did you ever hear of Relton? It's the most criminal place in London. Until lately they had no one there but an agent, an old policeman, with a parson as honorary secretary, and a committee of men. A month ago the parson resigned, and they appointed a secretary. There is no one on the committee to work except a few elderly trots who pay pensions. The whole place needs reorganisation. Now, will you go there and help the secretary to put that district right?"

"Is it near yours?"

"Next door. The chief wanted me to go, but I can't. Will you do it now?"

"Would he have me—this secretary?"

Dick Brabant pursed his lips.

"He's a girl, John."

John Glynn changed his position. He leant no more against the mantelpiece but stood stiffly erect, his lips closed down.

"Then I cannot do it, boy." The words were bitten out, with short emphasis. Dick blushed painfully, for John's face was hard as iron.

"A woman-hater, are you? That's a change."

The other gave a short laugh.

"A man can't hate what he has not seen."

"Then why the dickens——"

"My dear fellow," John interposed, with an impatience very unusual to him, "the reason is patent, surely. I have lived out West among men ten solid years. Not once have

I spoken to a woman except on an occasional visit to a married man's ranch. I have seen no society at all—I have no manners as women understand such things. A pretty figure I should cut dancing attendance on a girl: and a nice account you would receive of me. You know this lady, I suppose. Do you know her well?" The question came sharply and as if by an afterthought.

"I know her very well."

The men seemed to have changed places. It was John now who was restless, Dick who was quiet and still. But the change was only momentary. As his friend spoke, John, who had relieved his feelings by poking the fire, dropped the poker and regained his self-control. He looked hard at Dick, raised both hands and laid them on his shoulders.

"Is she the girl you wrote about, Evelyn Grey?"

Dick winced like a wounded man under the surgeon's probe.

"You have guessed it, John."

John slowly turned away. His mouth was as inflexible as ever, but there was a different expression in his eyes.

"Let me understand this thing," he said. "I don't want to hurt, but I must. Miss Grey—I have your letters, and remember every word in them—was your pupil in the work. You wrote of her every week, and it was when her name dropped out that I asked that question which made you tell me all. Six months she worked with you. You loved her, and thought, what you must have had every right to think, that she cared. Then you put the question and found yourself mistaken. Now, I gather, she is full secretary, with a district of her own. The chief has asked you to advise her, you say. He knows nothing, then?"

"No one does, no one ever will but you, and perhaps her mother. They live alone together. We settled that not a word was to be said, Evelyn and I, the day I spoke." He gave a big sigh, and tried to whistle, which is not easy when your teeth are clenched. "It was just a bit of madness of

mine, old man, and is buried now, miles deep, never to be heard of again."

John raised his eyebrows.

"'Never' is a hard kind of word, boy Brabant."

"It is the right word—here."

"Then she cares for some one else?"

Dick gave a little shout of contemptuous laughter.

"Good lord—not that! You don't know Evelyn."

"Nor want to, now," John remarked rudely. "But I want to know the whole position. Another question: If anything should change her, and she came to a different mind—what then?"

Dick laughed again, but this time with a softer sound.

"That is out of the question, she will never change."

John coughed.

"Well, you know her—I do not. But I understand, that is I have read," he added cautiously, "that women do occasionally change."

Dick did not reply. He had slipped back into his chair and was staring at the fire.

"If I were to put Evelyn into a novel," he said, after a long pause, "I should be howled at, and people would say that no such woman existed. Yet there must be many and those of the best. She certainly is the best—you hear that, John Glynn, *the best.*" He raised his voice.

"I hear," the other replied coldly, "but I do not understand one little bit."

"I will try to explain. It would break my heart if you misjudged her. Evelyn Grey is a real woman, sympathetic and tender-hearted. Children love her, and folk in trouble confide in her and lean on her. The only fault she had in her work was too great a readiness to take other people's burdens on herself; too keen a longing to right the universe off her own bat. No, make no mistake by thinking she is cold. She has a true loving heart, bless her. On the other side my love—the love of a man—and the mere idea of marriage, revolts her. You may say, of course, that this is because I am the wrong man. True in so far that I am not

good enough. But when we had it out afterwards she put it forcibly another way. All my life, John, I shall remember what she said, and how she said it—so earnestly and with such dignity, and yet as simply as a child. 'I do not in the least deserve,' she said, 'the honour you have done me. You see, I have no wish to marry any one, and never shall. I love my work too well. That and my mother make my life. You must promise never to think of me again in such a way. Then we can be true comrades, and in time help one another as we used to plan we would. Will you promise—friend?' That was all, but she looked so beautiful, so queenly, and yet so true a woman that I could have knelt on the dusty old office floor and kissed her hand. I didn't, but I promised what she asked, and I will keep that promise, as I am a man, old friend. And some day, when I can bear to see her and be near her—I cannot yet—but some day we will work together, and I will serve my lady as her friend."

A long silence followed. Dick lay back now idly in his chair, looking into the fire with tired, absent eyes. He had forgotten his companion, his mind had wandered back into the past.

John, on the contrary, was in the present. His eyes, watching his friend's sad face, softened until they were as tender as a woman's.

"Dick, lad," he said suddenly, "do you know what day this is?"

Dick shook his head.

"The 24th of October. Just five years ago to-day I lay, in Indian camp, strapped up with raw hide that cut me to the bone, beside a fire the Apache bucks had made to roast me slowly."

Dick moved in his chair impatiently.

"Well?"

"In another five minutes," John went on, "those piñon stakes would have been ablaze about my ankles, crisping them to a turn, while knives would have been busy at my eyes and teeth, and——"

Dick shuddered.

"Ugh, drop that. It makes me sick."

"I was sick then. I thought I had nothing but that five minutes between me and a three hours' wriggle over a slow fire. But I was wrong. I had you, boy."

He paused, and drew his hand across his eyes. His voice, low and quiet, grew less steady now, but he went on doggedly.

"You who had followed my track alone, knowing that the same death would be yours if they caught you—knowing that the chances against rescue were ninety-nine to one—you crept in among them, and while the bucks tended the fire, came behind me, cut the raw hide, and drew me out of hell."

His voice had dropped to a whisper; his strong hands, clasped together, trembled. Now he paused, and the room was very still for a moment. Then Dick laughed to break the strain.

"It was a rare touch and go. How the old pony lit out with the shots buzzing like bees all around. Lucky Indians never shoot straight when they're nervous, or we should have been riddled."

"We were lucky," John said, his voice under control again, "but you saved me."

"Nonsense, it was the old horse; we nearly broke his back."

"He's fat as butter now; I would not have him worked again."

"Good! That was like you, John."

Another pause followed. John's face had lost its grimness; he was smiling, as if at some thought. Dick looked supremely uncomfortable.

"I cannot conceive," he said pettishly, "why you brought up that stale old story now."

John laughed softly.

"It just came to me, partner. And now to business. It is midnight, and I must get away. I have changed my mind, and will start in at Relton to-morrow."

He spoke in a quiet, matter-of-fact tone. Dick jumped out of his chair.

"You will, after all, go to Evelyn?"

"As you wish it."

"Hurrah! You take a ton weight off my mind. Between ourselves—for this is insubordination—I don't think the chief ought to have sent such a girl to that damned hole. It's full of thieves, and every kind of low beast. If she had been a middle-aged frump it would have been different. Of course, there is Alfred Giles, her agent, big as a house, with the heart of a lion, to protect her, but he has his own work to do. Now, if you are there——"

John grunted.

"Leave that and tell me how you know that Miss Grey will have me."

"The chief will see to that. I will give you an introduction to him now to take at 10-30 to-morrow to the Central Office. If he passes you on, you need have no anxieties. Brooke's word is law, my friend, in the Society."

John's face brightened.

"Edward Brooke," he said. "I want to meet that man."

"He is the best that lives," Dick said coolly, writing fast. "But that you'll see yourself to-morrow." He sealed his letter down. "I think that will do the trick. Brooks has already heard of you. I wish you were not going to-night at all. You'll come here soon to live."

They were marching downstairs arm in arm. John pressed his shoulder against his friend's.

"I shall live nowhere else while I am in town, but I must have a day or two to settle things."

They reached the door and grasped hands. Suddenly Dick bent forward, after glancing along the passage.

"You understand now."

John buttoned up his coat-collar, for the wind cut like a knife.

"I am not quite sure," he said, "but I know what I have to do."

CHAPTER II

THE CHIEF

JOHN was staying at an hotel in Northumberland Avenue. The place was not to his taste in the least, nor were the attentions of a Bond Street tailor, who for a consideration of fifty pounds was supplying a variety of necessary clothing of what John thought were strange and fearsome shapes. But John was a person who never did things by halves. Dick Brabant had mentioned people of social position as co-workers in the Society, more especially one Lady Wendover, at whose house he often stayed, and who, John discovered, was an aunt of Miss Evelyn Grey. John was determined to be a credit to his friend; and as his sources of information concerning aristocratic persons were limited to casual hints from passengers on the liner coming home, he came to the conclusion, true to his American training, that he must sternly repress his natural instincts and spare no expense in clothes.

The visit to Hampstead gave him very different notions, and he returned to his palatial abode a wiser and happier man.

In the meantime, finding that Dick when he went abroad officially wore a silk hat and a black coat with tails, he did likewise, though he privately thought them barbarous things; and it was in the most irreproachable broadcloth that he faced the clerks of the Central Office of the Society the next day and presented his note for Mr. Brooke.

Mr. Brooke was engaged, but would see Mr. Glynn in a few minutes. John waited contentedly, for he had some curiosity to examine the office of this Society of which he had heard so much.

It was an odd office. The waiting room he stood in was a

narrow slit of a place, four feet wide and ten long, furnished with two Windsor chairs and a file of the *Times*. An open wooden case, containing papers and pamphlets in pigeon-holes, was fastened against one wall; a cabinet, obviously full of more papers, filled up space against another wall, and a file of papers stood against a third. There were papers, papers everywhere, the very atmosphere was heavy with the smell of paper.

Partitioned off from the waiting room was a clerks' room, with two men in it. John, who had a quick eye for faces, watched them with interest. Though they were doing ordinary clerk's work as far as he could tell, neither was like any clerk he had ever seen. There was an air of sturdy independence and responsibility about them which, though unexpressed, for both were silent as the grave in the presence of this stranger, was very obvious. It gave an individuality to their office, and removed the impression given to John at first by the shabbiness of his surroundings that the Society of which he had heard and read so much was a lean thing at the core.

He felt as he watched the clerks that the cause of these plain surroundings was a contempt of appearances. The bare, ill-furnished condition of the rooms, and the absence of anything in the place calculated to please the eye of a possible subscriber, or draw the favourable attention of a stranger who came within the gate, were matters of no importance to the authorities there.

In a measure this pleased John, accustomed for ten years to the rude simplicity of Western life. What lay behind it all?

A door at his back swung open, and as he turned a voice said heartily:

"Mr. Glynn."

It was the Chief Secretary himself.

John formally raised his hat, at which Mr. Brooke laughed and held out his hand.

"Glad to see you—come in."

He handed some papers he had brought with him to one

of the clerks, and then led the way briskly through another apartment, where sat a man with a face of the severe gravity befitting one clothed with the responsibility of keeping the Society's accounts, to his own private room guarded by a double door.

It was a small square room, as plainly furnished as the rest, with a flat-topped desk, covered with an immense pile of lately opened letters.

"You wish to take up work with us," Mr. Brooke said, dropping into a chair behind his desk, and indicating one in front of it where the light fell upon his visitor's face.

John smiled.

"If you can find any use for an unbroken horse, sir, who though no longer a colt, has yet never been shod. Has Dick Brabant told you?"

This was not at all the way John had intended to address this leader of a great social movement. But there was something about Mr. Brooke, at once so simple and sincere, that he blurted out the thought that was uppermost without considering the form of his words.

Mr. Brooke nodded.

"Brabant has told me a good deal, and we are willing enough. But you have been a trainer yourself out West. Come!"

He leant back in his chair, his hands clasped behind his head, a smile on his lips, acute penetration in his eyes.

John drew nearer to the table.

"That is true, but frontier folk are different from yours. I may have to begin by unlearning much of what I know."

"I don't think so; but it is easily proved. Tell me, Mr. Glynn——" He changed his position, and leaning his elbows on the table, rested his chin upon his hand. "How would you raise the condition of the poor?"

At such a question from such a man John drew himself together as he had once done in old days when a great professional of the "P. R." in New York had challenged him to a turn with the boxing gloves.

For an instant he suspected a practical joke, but a glance

into Mr. Brooke's eyes, questioning and grave, dispelled that notion at once.

"I would not begin by giving charitable relief," he said simply, "my plan would be to brace up every man, woman and child to be independent and stiff-backed. Charity folk go about making things soft and comfortable. Now, in our country when a man feels comfortable he lies down and goes to sleep. There may be no particular harm in that if he can get all he wants without work. But it is deadly if he has to support a home, and to do his duty as a citizen. That needs a strong back."

Mr. Brooke gave a joyous laugh.

"Verily the wise men of this generation come from the West, and we of the Old World receive wisdom from the land of the setting sun. Agreed. But how about those who have grown up with weak backs? Would you let them starve, put them in prison, or build a lethal chamber for them? Stay, let me put the question in a personal way. You are going to Relton. That is Brabant's idea and a good one. Now Relton abounds in wasters and weaklings. When they come to you from parson, or visitor, or what-not, who is tired of giving bread which has not been earned, and is honestly anxious, perhaps, to find a way of strengthening the backs if you can tell him how—what would you do?"

Mr. Brooke was certainly in earnest now. Even the smile on the lips had vanished, and John felt that he was faced by a question which no general statement or platitude would satisfy. It came from the man's heart, and upon the answer would depend his judgment of the worthiness of this new recruit to be a fellow-worker in the cause. This feeling inspired John to give back the best that was in him. The face of his questioner, with eyes of frosty blue—mobile and expressive yet firm as steel—was stimulating and inspiring beyond any he had ever known. A man for the strong was Edward Brooke. He made John think of an eagle in flight, careless of all small things beneath him. A man who was unerring in his detection of unrealities or shams, and who would pounce upon any false doctrine of

social betterment, strike it with pitiless logic and tear it in pieces without ruth or shrift.

"It is not easy to tell what I would do," John answered slowly; "but I know what I would aim at doing. First, I would make the weak-back want to be strong. If a man will not use his own strength it is worse than useless to touch him, for the more you do the less he'll try, and the heavier he will lean on you. So I would prick him and sting him until he stood up, then test him. When he stood the test I should help him, and make every friend and relative he had help him, to realise that having once got upon his feet he must keep on the move upward. He should have no rest, if I could manage it, till he was doing for himself. At the same time, though I would harry, and hunt, and hold him, I would make him feel we were friends, you know. It would be no good without that."

"Good!" ejaculated Mr. Brooke. "Very good."

"There are two ways of doing things," John went on, warming to his work under Mr. Brooke's approving face, as a man digging on a cold winter's morning basks in the beams of the sun. "I am the son of a country clergyman, and saw charity given, not by my father, but by his neighbours, as you give slop to swine. They thought a girl who failed to bob to the parson's wife deserved to be whipped. A cottager who did not doff to the squire's lady would have lost his living. But if they truckled enough they got all they asked for. They were lower beings, in short, while we were angels of light and healing. That is why I detest what is called charity. It is my notion that to help a man you must take him by the hand as an equal, get inside his mind, and make him get inside yours, as friends."

There was a knock at the door, and a clerk brought in two cards. John rose with an apology, but Mr. Brooke waved it aside. "I am at one with you entirely. Your creed is charity. There is no other. By the bye, you have not met Miss Grey?"

He had drawn papers towards him and now began to write.

"I have only heard of her."

"She's a bright girl." Mr. Brooke never stopped writing. "Brains and good sense. Strong health and nerves. And though a woman, she has not overtaxed them yet. Needs experience, but Relton is giving her that. She is doing Relton good too. They know nothing of women there. We sent her for that reason. An experiment, for the place is rough, too rough. But she likes it, and Relton likes her."

He finished his letter and sealed it down. "An official document," he explained, "with instructions."

They shook hands.

"I have not asked one question," Mr. Brooke said, a peculiar twinkle in his eyes. "Are you acquainted with the criminal type, the men who help themselves too well?"

John gave a confident backward jerk of the head which amused Mr. Brooke immensely.

"Yes, I have handled toughs for many years."

Mr. Brooke opened a private door.

"I hope," John said, wringing his hand, "you will not be disappointed."

Mr. Brooke in reply took hold of two fingers of his right hand with his left, and felt them tenderly.

"A man, Mr. Glynn," he said in solemn tones, "with such a grip as yours will not disappoint any one, I think—except, perhaps, the toughs. Good luck."

CHAPTER III

TOUGHS

JOHN walked up Villiers Place, emerged into the roar of the Strand, and consulted a pocket map of London.

It was early yet, and he calculated he could get to the office at Relton, and introduce himself to Miss Grey by twelve o'clock. A block at Wellington Street and another at Ludgate Circus spoilt his calculations, and it was half-past twelve when he found himself on the borders of the district of his choice, beyond the pale of omnibuses, with only his map to guide him.

Relton was a poor and crowded neighbourhood. It was within convenient distance of the city, and warehousemen, packers, porters, carmen, printers, and paper-makers made it their home. Such as these, with cabinet-makers and upholsterers, employed in and about the Curtain Road—emporium of the furniture trade—formed the aristocracy and middle class of the district. The ubiquitous builders' labourers, general labourers, and "handy" men made up the rest, together with "costers" of every description. There was also the usual sprinkling of tradesmen, resident clergy and ministers of religion, and dispensary doctors. Such was Relton, and, according to the official rate books, such it is still. Official records, however, though valuable documents as far as they go, do not always go far. In John Glynn's day, though there were streets in Relton as quiet and respectable, if not quite so expansive, as Belgrave Square, they stood apart from the main artery of Relton life. The centre of Relton twenty years ago, and in which the greater part of the population crowded like a swarm of bees—without, alas, any bee-like quality except the sting—was "the Nile."

What man or woman of London birth who has ever been the object of the professional interest of the Police does not know the Nile! In Dartford, Portland, and Pentonville it used to be a household word, and with good reason, for it was the home, or the training academy, of the worst thieves in the metropolis. No cracksman could be found in London who did not know the lads of the Nile.

In these days, we are told, the Nile is fast becoming a tradition of the past. The gangs which throve there once are either broken up or lodged elsewhere. Nile Street itself, that queer thoroughfare of little shops and stalls, from Shepherdess Walk to East Road, which dominates "the quarter," and from which it draws its name, and where in the palmy days "receivers" clustered like wasps in brown sugar, is now, it is said, a street of respectable houses of business which in time may produce a Mayor for the local Borough Council.

It is even reported that one policeman in uniform may wander unharmed through the Nile at night. In old times two were sometimes in danger in the day.

When John Glynn first set foot in Relton the Nile was in its glory. With some exceptions it was "slum" property of the worst kind, and even where the streets were wider and of better appearance, the houses were mostly let out in tenements room by room, and swarmed with bad characters. But it was in "the Warren"—a network of courts behind Nile Street—that the "guns" held the door against all comers—small dwellings with intercommunication from house to house in many cases, and mostly with a narrow frontage into a court only to be approached by passages three feet wide, and running fifty feet and more underneath the houses. Let a criminal once be fortunate enough to reach the "Warren," and however hotly pursued he was absolutely safe unless afterwards betrayed.

All these things John, who had taken a wrong turning, and instead of leaving the City Road at East Road went on to Shepherdess Walk, and so had to plunge into the centre of the Nile, discovered for himself.

A man who has known the purlieus of New York soon feels the pulse of such a district as the Nile. The men he met, ferrety in the eyes, coarse in the jowl; the women either too smart or miserably slatternly, with features as hard as those of an Indian squaw, were types quite familiar to John. They roused in him a desire to explore the district a little before presenting himself to Miss Grey. He had been startled more than he would have admitted to Dick at the thought of a woman working in a criminal neighbourhood. Now that he was face to face with the Nile, the dangers lurking for a young good-looking girl working there day in and day out, came home to him with such force that he drew up abruptly at the corner of the street to consider the position. There was still half an hour before the office closed at one o'clock, and by his map, which he had just examined, he was not more than ten minutes' walk off 19 Critchett Place—his destination; so he decided to spy out the land here and examine its peculiarities, as he used to do out West when there were Indian troubles.

Nile Street between twelve and one was extremely crowded. The ladies of the neighbourhood, many of whom had only been out of bed an hour or two, were marketing, jostled by factory girls seeking a frugal but tasty lunch from the nearest fried fish shop. All the shops were doing a good trade, and the costers, whose barrows and stalls lined the side walks, were at it hot and hard. The noise was deafening, every vendor of goods shouting at the top of his voice to draw attention to his wares—and fruit and butcher's meat, calico and crockery, sham jewelry and tripe, eels and old clothes changed hands with great rapidity.

In the midst of this hubbub John walked slowly and observantly, committing to memory the names of the streets off the Nile, and especially observing the entrances to the courts, one of which he went down to explore. At the end of the passage, however, he came upon a dozen women washing clothes, who greeted him with a banter so foul that, hard as his nerves were, he was glad to beat a hasty retreat.

He was half-way up the Nile now, approaching a broader,

quieter turning, with "Crisp Street" painted in black letters on the wall. The houses here were of handsome dark red brick, with spacious doorways. Once on a time barristers and professional men of position had lived in Crisp Street, and, still, in the winter evenings, when people kept indoors, an atmosphere of departed dignity clung to the old street—outside. Flights of broad steps led to the doorways, guarded by heavy carved iron railings. In some places the great knockers with the lion's head still remained.

John observed these things, leaning against the railings of a house near the corner of Nile Street, and looking up and down Crisp Street at the people in the windows and on the doorsteps. They were all of low class, the children dirty and neglected. He was now about to return to Nile Street and make his way to East Road, out of which Critchett Place ran, when an indistinct murmur of voices which he had heard for the last minute or so issuing from a window in the house behind him, became articulate, and he stood motionless, listening.

"The Organisation Society office," said a voice, biting, clear, metallic. "S. I. C. P. on the door. You can't miss it. No. 19."

"All right," replied another voice, hoarse and sullen. "But I ain't said I'll go yet."

The first speaker uttered two or three words which John could not catch. The window though open was half-covered with curtains, and the blind was down, and John's power of hearing, though trained to a high pitch by frontier life and experience, was taxed to the utmost.

"Five pound at least for you," were the next words he caught. "Cash-box always out in the morning. Safe, left-hand side."

More words followed which were inaudible. Then—

"It's the only job I have. You've no nerve."

The other now cursed aloud.

"Have I not?" he said in an angry tone; "I'd show ye, if it was a man—but a woman alone. Blast it, Mr. Nyne, I can't."

"Ssh—d—n you!"

There was a moment of silence, and then the conversation was resumed in whispers, and John heard nothing. At last he detected a sound as of shuffling feet, and the man with the metallic voice saying in a cheerful tone:

"Mind you see him out first. If the door is shut pitch a tale. That will get you in. Come now."

A few moments later two men came out into the street. The one named Nyne looked sharply up and down. He possessed a cat-like faculty for scenting danger he could not see, and had an instinctive feeling that they had been overheard, but he saw nothing to confirm his fears. No one was near the window. No one was in the street. The person nearest the house was a well-dressed man, obviously a stranger to the neighbourhood, leaning against a lamp-post, at the corner, studying a map of London.

CHAPTER IV

AN ACT OF CHARITY

JOHN stood against the lamp-post, which he reached in some haste, and with his map spread out looked warily about him.

He saw a door open, and the men come down the steps. He noted that the number of the house was 49, and he saw that one man looked uneasy. Then both turned his way and came slowly to the corner opposite.

By this time John was examining the map with close attention, but by raising his head a few inches he was able to take a mental photograph of both men.

They were a complete contrast to one another. One, obviously the man with the hard voice, was a spindle-shanked creature, ill-proportioned and ungainly, with immense hands and feet and a small round head atop of long sloping shoulders. The other, two inches shorter, was square-shouldered and powerfully made, particularly strong in the limbs.

John studied their faces carefully. The broad fellow was young, not more than one and twenty. He had a short square chin, and lips disfigured with old bruises—the lips of the fighting man. His nose, broad and fleshy, had evidently been broken at some time, and the bone hastily set. His eyes, set wide apart, were of fair size—the only decent feature in his face. They reminded John of a bulldog's, an animal which is naturally honest and quiet, but apt through ill-usage and bad training to become evil and dangerous. This bulldog, it was clear, had been very badly trained of late. The brow above the eyes was open and broad—a surprise to the observer, who had expected the narrow, receding forehead of a criminal. His eyebrows were drawn together in a heavy sullen frown.

From this face John turned to the other, and whispered an expletive under his breath. He had been familiar with bad faces of many kinds these ten years past, but had never seen anything like this. A flat, clean-shaven face, rather broad, seamed all over with fine lines, and bearing a gruesome resemblance to the face of a dead man John had seen once by moonlight thrust out of a badly-made grave. There was the same ashen colourless complexion, the same dull sunken eyes, expressionless, still, immovable. The nose was thin, but very full at the nostrils, the lips loose and elastic, covering a wide mouth furnished with large prominent teeth. Most curious of all was the appearance of the jaw. It was extraordinarily square, and a mere framework of bone. The cheeks above it were hollow and fleshless. The man wore a silk hat, drawn down to the ears, exposing a round narrow forehead. He was quite bald. His person was comfortably clothed, but his linen was unclean, and his coat and trousers plastered with mud.

All these things John noted as the men exchanged a few last words on the work. Then they separated, and John folded up his map and thrust it into his pocket. It was time for action.

Mr. Nyne—John had been saying the name over to himself while he watched so as to imprint it in his memory—turned down Nile Street, his companion crossing the road and passing within two feet of where John stood toward Critchett Place.

John let him go a few paces, and then strolled away at right angles along Crisp Street. When the man was out of his sight he broke into a long swift trot. He had studied the locality to some purpose, and in five minutes was in Critchett Place within a few paces of the office of the S. I. C. P. His thoughts had been busy as well as his feet, and a plan had entered his head which made him smile to himself like a boy about to play a practical joke. Yet the object of his scheme was not a joke. He slackened his pace and approached No. 19 slowly.

Critchett Place was a row of houses of obvious respect-

ability standing back from the roadway, with long flights of steps and front gardens enclosed within iron railings. Dressmakers, music teachers, and small tradesmen resided in Critchett Place, to judge by the brass plates on nearly every door. Opposite the Place was a church, standing in a large churchyard which had been converted into gardens frequented by the youthful population of Relton out of school hours, and adults with no particular occupation at other times when the weather was warm and fine. Just now they were bare and lonely.

The office of the S. I. C. P. was at the lower end of the Place, and John at once appreciated its advantages from Mr. Nyne's point of view. There were wire blinds to the front windows which shut out the view, there were few people about, and the garden in front though not large was extensive enough to prevent ordinary sounds within from being heard distinctly in the road. Lastly, at this end of the Place were several turnings and another thoroughfare, offering adequate means of escape.

His thoughts on this matter were interrupted by the sight of a man descending the steps of No. 19. He was a big and heavily built man with the unmistakable gait of an old policeman, steady, measured, and slow. He left the door open behind him, and, passing John, who was now gazing at the church-spire opposite, went northwards towards Crisp Street.

It was touch and go. If the intending thief were now in sight John's plan would have fallen to the ground, but the risk must be taken, and after making sure that Miss Grey's agent was well upon his way John turned in at the gate of No. 19, ran up the steps, and, entering, gently pushed the door behind him without closing it.

He was in a passage with two doors. One door to the left obviously led into the office—the other, at the extreme end, probably communicated with the upper part of the house. John advanced along the passage with noiseless step, listening. The side door was half-open, and through this he saw an outer office—empty, and beyond, divided only

by folding doors, an inner room from which came the scrape of a pen.

John made no pause here, but with firm gentle fingers tried the door at the end. The latch yielded without sound, and opening it a few inches he found himself faced, as he had expected, by a stairway. There was, moreover, another door beyond to the left, also slightly open, and through this door he saw a girl seated at a table under a window, writing. This was exactly what he wanted, and bracing himself to his task he pushed the hall-door wide, let himself through, and closed it behind him without a sound.

So far so good. The figure at the window went on writing, unconscious of his presence, and the door to the inner room was open so that he could observe all that passed there. The only thing to be feared was that the person who would shortly follow might imitate him, and so fail to carry out the attempt to which he had been committed by the skull-faced man. Now the figure at the window rose and crossed the room. John stepped aside and flattened himself against the wall. There was the scrape of a key in a safe and the clink of coin, and Miss Grey returned to the table with the office cash-box in her hands. But John scarcely noticed this. He was listening for a step outside, and at this moment heard it. The sound was slight enough but distinct, and John's face became rigid, his lips closed, and he softly laid aside an umbrella he had bought that morning in the Strand. Then plan he had in view was simple enough. He wanted to catch the thief in the act. This was not from any desire to ingratiate himself with Miss Grey by an exploit—he thought very little about her—but because he had been interested in the face of the thief, and still more in the man who was organising the theft. He believed he had stumbled upon an interesting chapter of Relton life, and wanted to get to the bottom of it.

Meanwhile, blissfully unconscious of what was hanging over her, both in the present and the future, the Secretary of the Relton Committee of the S. I. C. P. spread out her money on the table and with an anxious mind began count-

ing it over to see if it balanced with the sum written down to the credit of the Committee in her petty cash book. Accounts were not Miss Grey's strongest point, and Monday, the day before the Committee met, when a Balance Sheet had to be made up for the Chairman to read on Tuesday, was always the blackest day in the week.

This morning, especially, she had been paying out a larger amount than usual in small sums, and was possessed with the horrible presentiment that some one whose name she could not remember had gone away without signing a receipt for half a crown.

In consequence she was more than usually preoccupied with her task, and her eyes and ears were closed to all outward things. A shadow was thrown across the folding doors and a face peeped through. Slowly and softly the doors were opened a few inches, then a foot, and a man stood between them poised for a spring. Miss Grey, her back to him, saw nothing.

"By your leave, miss."

An arm closed round her like a vice, and a handful of gold disappeared with lightning speed into a capacious coat pocket.

For an instant the shock and the man's grip paralysed the girl. She was too much startled even to cry out. But she came of a fighting race, and caught the thief by the wrist.

"Give it up—or I rouse the house."

The man laughed—at least he drew breath to laugh, knowing the house was empty, but at that instant he was seized by the throat, the arm with which he had caught the girl was twisted back so sharply that the bone cracked, his feet were swept from under him, and he was flung bodily into a corner of the room.

"Stay still there," a man's voice said, quiet and controlled, but with an ominous bite in it, "or I shall hurt you."

Then John turned to the girl and raised his hat. "I hope he has not hurt you. I am sorry I was not quick enough."

Miss Grey looked from one to the other in speechless

amazement. Who on earth was this big man addressing her as calmly as if throwing a man violently down upon his head was his usual manner of introducing himself to a lady? A detective probably—but it was no time for speculation. She saw the thief stealthily rising to his feet.

"Can you hold him," she said anxiously, "while I go for the police?"

The big man gave a queer little laugh.

"We'll not do that—yet." Then in a sharp stern tone, "Get behind that table."

Miss Grey obeyed, her heart in her mouth. The thief was moving out of the corner, his face convulsed, his hands clenched, his eyes inflamed and bloodshot with passion. He was no slinking creature ready to run, but a wild beast at bay. Instinctively she turned to watch the other man. He had a smile on his face which was not a pleasant one. His eyes held a curious gleam within them more terrible than the glare of the thief, and as he stepped backwards with a motion of his hands, he made her think of a tiger about to spring.

Now the struggle came. The thief leapt forward with a low inarticulate cry and struck two tremendous blows. The first sent a new silk hat spinning into the waste-paper basket; the second struck home on his enemy's chest, but even as the assault was made it was met and countered by a blow that hurled the assailant back with a gasp and a catch of the breath, which Miss Grey heard afterwards in her dreams, head first into the fireplace, where he lay still and insensible, his face across the fender.

John stooped over the body, Miss Grey at his side.

"You have killed him," she cried breathlessly. "His skull is fractured."

The thief's head was bleeding copiously.

John examined the damage. "He's all right," he said. "Water and bandages will make him as good a man as ever —perhaps better, if I have luck. Have you a handkerchief? I have lost mine."

She pulled one out trimmed with lace,

"No good—that," John said without ceremony. "His scarf will be better."

Miss Grey sprang up.

"Wait, I have some linen upstairs. Go to the sink on the landing and fill a basin of water; I will be down in a moment."

John looked doubtful.

"He might come to——"

She almost stamped at his cold-heartedness.

"Would you have the man bleed to death?" she cried. "Every moment is precious."

She vanished, and John, for the first time in his life obeying a woman, ran down below and filled a basin at the sink.

In the passage on his return he met Miss Grey with a handful of linen, and they entered the room together.

It was empty. Blood was on the fender, blood was on the floor, and the scarf John had taken off lay there. But the thief was gone. John dropped his basin and dashed outside, in time to see the man, at the opposite side of the church-yard, disappearing into the courts beyond, and not a soul in sight to stop him. He returned to the house and found Miss Grey examining her cash.

"It is awful," she cried. "He has taken ten pounds at least."

John felt many things and perhaps looked some of them, but he prudently kept them to himself.

"He is at least—alive," he remarked.

"Yes," she said thankfully. Then, the humour of the situation striking her, she began to laugh. "How ridiculous I was about the man. It is all my fault."

But John was in no laughing humour.

"I wish I could think so," he said grimly. "I mean," he added hastily, "that I am responsible. You did not know the risk we ran; I did."

CHAPTER V

FIRST AID

THERE are few sharper tests of character in a small way than the manner in which a man behaves before a woman when he feels that he has made a fool of himself.

The departure of the thief with a goodly "swag" had irritated John almost beyond endurance. He had laid his plans carefully, carried them out successfully. To see them frustrated in so absurd a way was maddening. That Miss Grey had declared herself to be the sole cause of his discomfiture was nothing to the point. Why had he been such a fool as to obey her? That the thief had a broken head, the marks of which he would carry all his life, was not the least consolation either. John himself would readily have endured twice as much to have caught him. But for one thing John would now have departed abruptly, for a time, lest such words might escape him as could never be forgotten or forgiven by a lady. But he was prevented by Mr. Brooke's letter. It must be delivered whatever happened, to establish his identity. So, exercising an immense amount of self-control to keep his tongue between his teeth, John drew the letter from his pocket and handed it to Miss Grey with a formal bow.

That young lady was sublimely unconscious of her visitor's state of mind. She was a trifle disappointed at his curt response to her frank avowal of responsibility for the escape of the thief, and she felt instinctively that she was dealing with a man strange to her experience; but John's self-control was successful so far that Miss Grey had no notion of the bitterness that possessed his soul, and when she saw the welcome handwriting of her chief secretary, she beamed upon him most graciously.

"From Mr. Brooke—oh, please sit down." She broke the seal of the letter and read it rapidly while John, with his mind fixed upon an immediate departure, rescued his hat from the waste-paper basket, and mechanically smoothed out the creases in it caused by the accident. While doing so he saw something else demanding attention. He put his hat aside.

Miss Grey meanwhile read her letter over with much approval.

"I send you a man," Mr. Brooke wrote, "who is in earnest. He is no casual worker, but has come to us with a purpose. You should be able to use him for many things. He will be a right hand to smite with: a rock of strength to lean upon. And with it all he is full of tenderness, and a gentleman."

The letter read, Miss Grey looked up prepared to give her new worker a suitable official greeting. She found him on his hands and knees washing away with a piece of her linen the bloodstains of the late departed, the tails of his long coat trailing gracefully in the dust.

"Oh, don't," she cried in genuine distress. "That is my business."

John deftly wrung out his cloth, and smiled a superior smile. He was recovering his temper.

"I am more used to this, I expect, than you are. Anyway," rising and placing the bowl on the table, "it is done."

"But I am disgraced," Miss Grey said brightly, very much wanting to laugh but not daring to. "When my Committee know that your first work in their office was to mop the floor, I shall receive a reprimand from the Chair which will be entered on the minutes."

"I will interview the Chairman then," John said, "if you will give me his address."

His face had cleared up, and Miss Grey now thought it on the whole a pleasant one. Certainly intelligent and strong. She was studying him professionally.

"At least," he went on, wiping his hands, "we will bear the disgrace together."

"That would not be fair. But what is the matter with your hand? No, I must see it, please. Why, your fingers are badly hurt."

John gave the offending members a contemptuous shake. "His mouth was open. A little plaster will settle it."

He took up his hat, intending to make this an excuse to depart. He did not know Miss Grey.

"You will kindly get some fresh water," she said in a business-like tone, "and then I will make up a bandage out of this stuff and bind up your fingers. I wish I had some antiseptic lotion."

John protested, but he might as well have addressed Miss Grey's office chair.

"Mr. Brooke has placed you under my authority," she continued coolly, "and you must please do what you are told. Besides"—with an appeal in her voice that was irresistible—"you could not be so ungenerous as to deny me the consolation of feeling that my poor rags are to be of some service. Please!"

So John had again to pay a visit to the sink, and upon his return submit to having his sore hand bathed by Miss Grey.

He experienced the most curious sensations. The escape of the thief ceased to trouble him. The touch of the soft, firm fingers and a faint scent of violets, which came from a bunch in her dress, drove away all thought of other things. This, then, was Evelyn Grey. No wonder boy Brabant had lost his head. The only wonder was that any refusal could make him pause. It was inconceivable that any man—— But at this point John pulled himself forcibly together. What was he about? He had come into the presence of a girl to help his friend, and if it were possible, to win for the lad what he could not reach alone. That was not to be done by growing sentimental himself.

Miss Grey, meanwhile, was placidly proceeding with her bandaging.

"I enjoy this, you know," she said without looking up—which was just as well, for John's face was at the moment

extraordinarily grim. "I went through an ambulance course once and won a certificate, and ever since have yearned to be in a railway accident, unhurt myself of course, to test my skill. I shan't do you any harm."

John said nothing, but, while Miss Grey, having covered the raw places with pieces of cotton wool, began deftly winding the linen which she had torn in narrow strips, round and round his hand, he observed her quietly. She was a tall slight girl, graceful and shapely, with a face full of character. Her features were rather marked, the mouth full and very firm, the chin, in spite of a dimple, too square from an artistic point of view, and the nose, though delicately made, a little high in the bridge. It was the face of one who loved to lead. Yet it was very beautiful, with delicate complexion, and large, expressive blue eyes. She had a mass of wavy brown hair which, though straitly bound, could not be controlled altogether, but rebelliously broke loose over her forehead and neck, and made her look very young, in spite of her strong features. Assuredly Dick was to be commended as a man of judgment, and Relton likely to prove a delectable place for social work.

John was roused from these reflections by the sound of a step at the front door. Some one came into the outer office. He made an involuntary movement to disengage his hand. Miss Grey tied the last knot of the bandage.

"My agent," she said in a low tone. Then raising her voice, "Giles, come here and see your boastful prophecy fulfilled. We have had a burglary to-day—a real, real burglary."

A laugh came from the other room.

"You'll pardon me, miss," said a big voice as the man John had seen now came slowly through the folding doors, "but you means house-breaking. Burglary is a night job. How d'ye do, sir?"

He bowed to John, now introduced by Miss Grey, shaking hands with him after a moment of hesitation which came, not from the bashfulness of an awkward man, but the reticence of a proud one.

Alfred Giles was a very large man, towering some inches over John, with the chest and limbs of a giant and a shrewd, rugged face, punctured with a pair of brown eyes that penetrated unerringly any sham or hypocrisy in high and low, but with equal certainty would detect the gold hidden under a rough exterior. He had a square forehead in which lay a mine of experience, knowledge, and sound judgment. An ideal inquiry-officer was Alfred Giles for a Society the aim of which was to help all workers in Charity to be more just and thorough in their dealings with the poor, and, while probing to the root the cause of the distresses they were called upon to cure, to know the people and their environment, the good in them and the evil also—so that they might raise them to a higher and a better life.

John's heart warmed to the man, and as they grasped hands he smiled, whereupon the old agent's great fist closed with a huge and hearty grip.

"I am very pleased to meet you, sir," he said.

Miss Grey now described the incident of the morning. Giles's excitement knew no bounds.

"Floored him, did ye?" he cried. "Well, I'm sure. A knock-out that was. A regular knock-out. Then—excuse me—but you've done a bit of fighting in your time. Now tell us what happened, exact. Ah, never mind Miss Grey, she bears with me. I want to know particulars. What did ye give him?—right hand cross counter? Ah, the left, was it? The upper cut, I guess. Yes, yes, yes—and that is the blow, too, when they make a rush. Lord! I'd have give five pounds to have seen ye, sir—I would, sure."

He rubbed his great hands and laughed like a boy. Upon hearing of the escape his face fell.

"You don't say that. Got away with the money. Eh—but that be terrible bad news. We may get him—we will if we ferret half London. But the money," he gave a deep sigh, "that we'll never see no more." He shook his head, then his eyes narrowed until they were mere slits of glittering ore in a rock.

"Describe him, if you please, sir," he said, his tone un-

consciously becoming as curt as in the old days when he was the smartest constable at the Bagnigge Wells station in the King's Cross Road. "Black hair, eh?—cut short I'll warrant. Nose of a prize-fighter—yes, yes. Scar on upper lip. That's something to remember. Broke a tooth, did ye—that's a good mark. Red scarf—what, you have it there? Hand it over, please. Five foot ten in height as near as may be, yes. If we could only find out just where he belongs. There's so many like him about here."

He became depressed again for a minute. But when John, drawing him into the other room on some excuse, described the beginning of his acquaintance with the man, Giles beamed like a noon-day sun.

"Why, then, I'll have him, sure. But it's a big job, sir, and I must go to my friend Sam Smith, that's the Superintendent of Police for this division, and cleverest officer I ever knowed. This Percival Nyne"—he lowered his tone to a whisper—"is House Agent for half Crisp Street. He keeps two or three shops, owns the Warren, and is a little tin god, as you may say, in the Nile. Lor! when I tells Sam Smith that Nyne's a gun himself—but I 'spects he knows it—he knows everything, does Smith."

It was time for lunch. Miss Grey, though very busy and privately at her wits' end how to spare the time—offered to show her new worker the books of the office, and put him in the way of picking up their methods of work. But John had his own plans, and was also quick enough to notice the latent hesitation in her tone. He asked if he might spend the afternoon with Giles. This suited everybody admirably, and, arranging to meet Miss Grey at five o'clock to report progress and talk over the programme for the following day, John and the old agent departed.

Evelyn watched them as they walked away, Giles talking, Mr. Glynn listening. They were an interesting couple, she thought, and with her chief secretary's letter in her pocket she congratulated herself upon the possession as a worker, of this quiet strong man.

The men as it happened were talking of Miss Grey.

"Mark my words, sir," Giles was saying, "go where you please—and there's thirty-eight Committees of the Society spread over London—you'll never find the like of Miss Grey. Until I knew her I disbelieved altogether in ladies for our work. The most as I see had too much feeling for them creeping, crawling widders as goes to Mother's Meetings, and those loafing-do-nothings of men who have no work because they want none. Ladies are so easy taken in with a well-pitched tale, and they are for ever and ever having pets. But Miss Grey—she's opened my eyes. I don't say she's perfect. She is mighty tender-hearted, and Relton is the warmest spot in this little village of ours. She has a heap to learn. But she will learn, and that's where she be so unlike most of 'em. She needs a teacher—but she's worth teaching. I'll say no more about it though—I likes her too well for my judgment to be fair, but if you stop with us, you'll hit my meaning."

He paused suddenly—a way he had. "You will stop, I hope. We need a gentleman in this office—bad."

They had reached the corner of the street, and had to wait for a tram to pass along the thoroughfare of the New North Road, before they could cross.

The old man was looking at John with his head a little on one side, and an expression John thought he understood.

"You catch my meaning, sir?"

"I shall stay," John said as their eyes met, "while I am needed."

Giles rubbed his hands, with a broad, expansive smile. "Then, you will be here for always, Mr. Glynn."

CHAPTER VI

THE LADY OF THE "ORGANISATION"

EVELYN GREY had a long list of visits to pay this afternoon, and hurried over her lunch—a packet of sandwiches and a glass of milk—faster than usual, which was saying a good deal.

The duties of the secretary of the Relton office of the S. I. C. P. were many, her responsibilities considerable. The district having a bad name, ladies who would travel from the remotest suburb to work among the poor in the East End avoided Relton. The days of women's "settlements" had not arrived, while the local district visitors and other church and chapel worthies had their own business to attend to, and as in most cases their notions of raising the condition of "their poor" lay in a distribution of benefits which had more relation to the number of times the recipient attended church or mothers' meetings, and the regularity with which their children came to the Sunday school, rather than the particular need or distress they might be in, their ministrations were not of much service to Miss Grey.

Alone, therefore, with occasional help from stray visitors where a family was well known to the church, Miss Grey pursued her business, studying the circumstances and disposition of the poor who entered her office day after day to seek help in their difficulties, and trying to find a cure for the ills from which they suffered. Giles made the inquiries into their *bona fides*, and for information of that kind she was able to rely implicitly upon his judgment. But the harder task of thinking out a plan to help the fallen to a better life, and the unfortunate to independence, and to combine the scattered resources of kindly-disposed employers, friends, and charities, so that real help should be given to

each family, and the remedy proposed for the distress remove its cause,—that was Evelyn's especial work. Beyond this again lay a greater task, no less than the drawing into co-operation and a habit of mutual help the friends of the poor in Relton, who now mostly held aloof from one another: the clergy and ministers, the Poor Law Guardians, employers of labour, and the rest, and inducing them to work together for the benefit of all instead of separately to "influence" a few.

Such a work is the ideal of every secretary of the Society, and has been realised at least in part to-day. But in Evelyn's time in Relton it was not more than a dream of the future. She had a committee, which met weekly, and on which were clergy and other local people, and two or three men of means and sound judgment from the West End. But these were more interested in the "cases" of misfortune brought before them for relief than in the general question of organisation in the district. The initiation of this larger work, Evelyn found, must come from herself alone.

It was a heavy responsibility for a girl of five and twenty. But she loved it well, and the very weight of it was one of the chief attractions of the work to her. A woman may do mere detail better than a man—but she does not care to consider it her business in life.

This day, as it happened, a great hope of practical advance had come. A clergyman had called and left his card, the Rev. Stephen Merwell, lately inducted into St. Margaret's, Crisp Street. He was from the North Country: a young man, energetic and earnest. He had heard of the Society, it appeared, and was anxious to enlist its aid and advice in the relief work of his parish. Evelyn's heart warmed towards him. There was an entire absence of cant in his somewhat blunt, abrupt manner of speech, and a merry twinkle in his black eyes. He was a thin, wiry person, business-like and brief in conversation, frankly ritualistic in his dress, yet full of practical common sense, and with evident knowledge of the kind of people among whom he had come to work. After ten minutes' talk on general

subjects, he arranged to attend the committee meeting next day—putting off another engagement to do it—and then pulled out a pocket-book, and asked her advice on a case. It was that of a girl lying ill with lung trouble. Would Miss Grey visit, and advise him what ought to be done? Evelyn accepted the commission very willingly; upon which Mr. Merwell, with a sigh of relief, rose to take his leave.

"I will give anything that is necessary, up to £5," he said, "if you will tell me what to do."

While eating her lunch Evelyn took up her visiting list, and placed the name and address upon it: "Amy Bent, 49 Crisp Street." She looked up the office index, and found that the name was not known there, so had not spoken of the case to Giles. It happened, therefore, that she journeyed thither after her other visits were done, unconscious of the fact that from this house had come her acquaintance of the morning who had robbed the office of ten pounds.

It was a cold, damp afternoon in late autumn, with a suggestion of fog—a depressing day. Evelyn felt tired out when she reached Crisp Street. The loss of the money hung heavily upon her mind. She must make it up to the committee, of course, and that was not pleasant, for she had little money to spare; but this was the least part of it. From a word dropped by Giles just before he went out, she gathered that he believed the theft had been deliberately planned. It might happen again. In any case the committee would say at once it was the result of having a woman as secretary. From this unpleasant reflection her thoughts turned to her new worker. He ought to be useful. But, after all, he was not what she wanted. She did not want a "right arm to smite," she wanted a comrade to work with. If only he had been a woman. Men had their uses, but as friends—she gave a little shiver—it was playing with fire.

Evelyn was now at number 49, at the door of which she knocked three times. It was opened after a long interval by one of the stoutest women she had ever seen. This woman called herself Amy Bent's aunt.

"We lives together," she said, in an obsequious tone.

"My name's Prickett. You are from the Vicar, I suppose. Yes, quite a young gentleman, and wonderful nice to speak to, but new to these parts, or he'd have left at least a coal ticket. But he'll learn better by-and-by. Come up, miss, if you don't mind stairs."

There was a long narrow passage from the door to the stairway, which was very dark. Evelyn wished she had called earlier. It was now nearly four o'clock. She did not like Mrs. Prickett either. She was cleaner in person than most Crisp Street people, but she had a coarse face and a cunning, shifty eye.

"It's on the top floor," she said, cheerfully, in answer to a question. "Oh, yes, the very top of all. And my asthma something terrible. But poor folks can't be choosers.—And Amy so ill and all—I did think the Vicar would have left a little somethink—but there, as I said, he's ignorant, and *she* never asked him. She never will, she has such a sperrit, poor lamb."

At this point the good lady became too breathless to speak, and Evelyn was spared further conversation. But she had heard enough. The Crisp Street mixture of "whine" and impudence was in full evidence here. She was prepared for the worst.

They reached the top storey at last, and entered a large, well-kept room, furnished more substantially than most Crisp Street homes. This disposed Evelyn more favourably to the case, and when she saw on a clean bed at the further end a young girl with a very pretty face and big, truthful, brown eyes, her spirits rose.

"I have heard from Mr. Merwell, the Vicar, that you were ill," she said, in a quiet, friendly tone. "He asked me to see you."

"Are you a visiting lady from the church, then?"

Evelyn bit her lip. The speech of this child with a Madonna-like face was as harsh and shrill as other Relton girls', marked with a pronounced Cockney accent. She was sharp, too, for she began by asking a question.

"No," Evelyn answered, and now her eyes became watch-

ful. "I am the secretary of the society in Critchett Place. Have you ever heard of it?"

She expected a sudden change of manner. The S. I. C. P. was not beloved in Crisp Street. A change was immediately noticeable in Mrs. Prickett. Her face stiffened, and her eyes sank into her fat cheeks as if they would disappear altogether; her full, loose lips drooped, and she sat still, with her head bent a little forward, like a cat aware of danger but not sure whether to scratch or run.

The girl laughed.

"I know," she said. "They call it the Organisation round here, and say it makes inquiries into a person's grandmother. Have you come for that, or how?"

"My inquiries depend upon whom I have to help. You are ill, I hear. To get well you have asked the Vicar for aid."

"I didn't," shaking her head aggressively. "I wouldn't, not if I was to die. It were Mr. Nyne or aunty did that."

"Mr. Nyne," Evelyn said. "The landlord. You owe him rent, perhaps?"

"Not a pennoth," the girl said, shorter still. "He's a friend of my—of aunty's, here."

She hesitated a little. It was only for an instant, and she looked Evelyn boldly in the face all the time. But the practised ear of the secretary noted the uncertain tone. At this point Mrs. Prickett struck in.

"Eh, Mr. Nyne is a dear, good gentleman," she said. "Knowed our Amy since she was a babby. He says to me, 'Mrs. Prickett,' says he, 'Dr. Stansfield'—that's her doctor —'says she must have lots of eggs, and beef tea, and such like. You go to the clergyman at once. It is the business of them,' he says, 'to help a poor sick girl what is respectable and quiet and 'ard-working.' So I goes to the Vicar, and then he calls yesterday, and then, as I told yer, did not give even a ticket——"

"But sent me to-day to look into the whole matter," Evelyn added quickly. Mrs. Prickett's tongue was hard to stop. "I see; thank you. Now, Amy—if I may call you

so—will you let me ask you a few questions about yourself, so that we may become friends—we are strangers as yet—and so that, if I can, I may be able to get you all you need? Or do you think that, as I am a stranger, you would rather not have anything to do with me? Don't be afraid to speak quite plainly. You must decide, not I."

She spoke cheerfully and kindly, but the eyes that were now fixed on the girl's face were steady and keen, and Amy hesitated again. She saw at once that this was no "visiting lady," with a Bible in one hand and a book of grocery tickets in the other.

"She's quite different," the girl thought. "She'll want to know all about it, she will, and yet—I like her."

"I ain't afraid, miss," she answered at last. "I've nothing I'm ashamed of. I've worked at my place five year blouse-making, and every one in the Nile knows I ain't a gad-about. I am not feared for you to go anywheres about me."

"Well said," Evelyn answered cordially. "Then we will soon get to know one another."

She took out a paper and pencil and began her questioning. It was a simple process enough at first, but presently, after Miss Grey had ascertained the length of time Amy had lived at her present address, her occupation and her earnings, where she worked, and the time she had been ill, the voice of the questioner grew perceptibly slower and more distinct.

"Does your aunt rent this house?" she asked, biting her pencil.

Mrs. Prickett moved uneasily in her chair.

"Mr. Nyne is the landlord; a kind landlord he is, a real charitable gentleman. You should see him, miss."

"I will," Evelyn said briefly. "Then you take this room from Mr. Nyne?"

Amy nodded, but did not speak.

"What do you pay?"

"Six shillings and sixpence a week."

Evelyn played with her pencil again.

"Isn't that a heavy rent for one room on the top floor?"

"It's the rent," the girl said shortly, as if ruffled.

"Thank you," Evelyn answered, in a scrupulously polite tone. "I thought, perhaps, you might have another room."

Mrs. Prickett held up both hands, reproachfully.

"I do believe you think we would deceive you, miss. The idea! You a charity lady and all! What do we want two rooms for? But it's easy proved if you see Mr. Nyne."

"Thank you," Evelyn interposed, "I should prefer to see the rent book. May I, please?"

She took it quite as a matter of course, and gazed innocently and directly into Mrs. Prickett's perturbed face. That worthy looked for the first time fairly taken aback.

"I don't know as you can," she said in a vague tone. "But Mr. Nyne——"

A giggle came from the bed, ending in a heavy fit of coughing.

"Eh, aunty," Amy said in a whisper, "you've opened your mouth too wide this time. Look in the teapot, miss."

This was an indiscretion, and Mrs. Prickett began to lose her temper.

"'Tain't in the teapot," she snapped, "Mr. Nyne took it away with him yesterday."

"But perhaps he brought it back to-day," Evelyn said, putting down her paper and pencil. "May I look? Thank you. Why, here it is after all."

She had stepped up to the mantelpiece where Amy had pointed, and returned to the bed with the book in her hand before Mrs. Prickett had time to get out of her chair.

At sight of the first page Evelyn's face became very grave.

"The name of the tenant of this room," she said, "is a Mr. Joseph Cramp."

She looked at Amy, and Amy replied—Mrs. Prickett was speechless—"That's my young man."

"He lives here, then, as well?"

"In t'other room—we have two—when he's at home, and that ain't often. He don't seem to have no luck, my Joe." And she sighed.

"You are—engaged?"

"Kep' company a year, and to be married as soon as I am well. Anything more you want to know?"

She was defiant now, and her breath came in slow, laboured gasps. Yet for all her aggressiveness there was a latent appeal in her big eyes, an appeal for sympathy and help. Evelyn saw this, and though shocked at what she had heard, and fearing many things, she was touched by it, and with a sudden impulse bent over the bed and laid cool, caressing fingers on the girl's hot forehead.

"You are excited," she said, "and that is bad for you. If you like we will finish our talk to-morrow."

The kind, considerate words, and, most of all, the caress, melted the girl's heart. She sank back on her pillow and took Evelyn's hand in both her own.

"You rest me when you talks that way. I knew as you didn't think me bad. But most of your kind would. I ain't, you know, not particular bad. If you knew Joe, and saw us together, you'd see that. He's rough, is Joe, with men, but with me so gentle and kind. Why, if he weren't real down on his luck now I'd never have had to ask any one for anything. As it is, he's borrowed and borrowed from Mr. Nyne to get me nourishment and things, until I wouldn't let him do it no more. And now he's that miserable it breaks my heart to see him, all because I brought up a drop of blood, and doctor says I have a patch on my lungs, or something. But you'll help me for to get well and send me away somewheres. Only, don't tell Joe where you come from, he's that proud."

"We'll see, we'll see," Evelyn said soothingly. "I must hear what Dr. Stansfield says. I know him, as it happens. I should also like," she added softly, "to see Joe."

Amy's face glowed with pleasure.

"You shall see him to-morrow, for sure, if you'll tell me when you'll call. He's out of work, poor chap, and can be here at any time."

"What is his trade? I hear of work sometimes."

"He's a locksmith, and a mighty clever one. But trade is very bad just now."

Evelyn drew on her gloves with a thoughtful face. A locksmith had told her a week ago that business was brisker than usual.

"To-morrow, then, at two o'clock."

"That will do beautiful. I am expecting him in now. I ain't seen him all day, and feel that hungry: you'll understand. You has a gentleman of your own, I'll be bound."

This sudden personal allusion was startling, and Evelyn repudiated it with emphasis. Amy gave an incredulous giggle.

"They must be loonies, then, your lot. I wonder there ain't a dozen after you."

Evelyn hastily picked up her umbrella to depart. As she did so, and turned to say good-bye, the door opened softly and a man looked in.

"Joe," cried Amy, starting up; "why, you are just in time. Lady, this is my young man."

Evelyn looked round with keen interest. This man, whatever he might be, held the girl's soul in his hands.

The window was behind her, so that she stood in deep shadow, for the room was darkening fast. The man did not see her, but as he came in she saw his face distinctly. It was the thief.

CHAPTER VII

A LION IN THE PATH

EVELYN'S visitor of the morning came straight to the bed without noticing her.

"How's the cough?" he said in a cheerful tone. "I got you some lozenges." He tossed five sovereigns into her lap. "That's for you to go to the sea-side with, little 'un, soon as you can pack."

Amy gave a cry of delight and held out her arms.

"Oh, Joe, Joe!" was all she said. Then, as he kissed her, with difficulty, owing to his sore mouth, she burst out to Evelyn in a tone of triumph: "What price my man, miss?"

Joe turned swiftly round, and recognised Evelyn at once. He did not move or speak. He gave one gasp, and stood and stared at her, stunned and nerveless, while Evelyn for a moment felt almost as helpless as he, and Amy peered at them in wonder. It would all have been over in an instant had not the girl caught sight of a bandage under Joe's cap, soaked with blood.

"Oh, what have you been doing?" she cried shrilly, forgetting everything in her anxiety and distress. "Why, you've been fighting again and after what you promised me. Joe, you are right down dishonest; I'll never believe in you again. Eh, but what's that for?" as the man, with a groan, crouched on the bed like some hunted thing and buried his face in his hands. "He's ill," she exclaimed. "He's dyin'; Joe, Joey!"

Her cry rose to a wail of alarm, and she would have struggled out of bed to him had not Evelyn caught her in firm, restraining arms.

"Lie still, dear. You must, or you will be very ill. Try

to be brave and strong. Don't you think," she said to the man, "you had better tell her something?"

Her voice was cold and severe, and Amy felt a quick impulse of resentment, but she forgot this as Joe sat up obedient to the word, and said in a low mechanical voice, staring at the wall before him:

"There ain't nothing the matter with me beyond a clip or two I've had. I did fight, and for the first time have been badly beat, Amy, girl. I won't deny—I won't deny nothing"—raising his voice. "I have been knocked out, clean over the ropes, and it's all U—P with me."

He paused, breathing hard, with tightly clenched hands, waiting for Evelyn to speak. But Evelyn said nothing. The sight of Amy's pale agonised face paralysed her. The girl was leaning against her shoulder. She had not the heart to speak—yet. It was Amy, herself, who broke the silence.

"Hear that now," she said in an awed tone. "Eh, he must be bad to speak so. Joey, lad, why did ye fight? It was not for me, was it? You did not go and do that for this?" shaking the sovereigns in her hand.

He dropped his head on his hands again. "What I did was for you," he muttered.

"You coward!" Evelyn's blood was rising fast, her pity for Amy giving way to contempt for the man. He winced at her words like a wounded animal, while Amy fired up.

"What d'ye mean? He always fights for me. That's how the rent is paid and a heap of things. It's only boxing in them competitions. I'm proud of him—though I hate his company. And I'm proud of him now, more than ever I was, and love him for it. Joey, come here and show me where you're hurt. Don't be strange-like 'cos of her—don't be a fool."

She held out her arms to him, but the man rose from the bed as if he could not bear her touch. Then, turning, he came back and faced them with grey set face.

"She's right, Amy," he said slowly, "I am all she says.

There ain't no getting out of that, and before her I will tell the truth. Eh, God Almighty! what's that?"

There had been a sharp knock at the door.

"It's only doctor," cried Amy. "Come in!"

It was the doctor—a little middle-aged man, dressed in clothes that would have disgraced Petticoat Lane, but with spotless linen, and a kind face marked with refinement and intellectual power.

He greeted Amy, nodded to Mrs. Prickett and Joe, and shook hands cordially with Evelyn.

"Well—well—well," he cried. "You here! What has this poor child done to be under the inquisition—I mean the society? Ah, I remember, it is that new parson. Yes, yes. Well, much as I hate—ahem—you and all your works, I am glad to see—this. Call on me to-morrow at ten and get a certificate. You are needed here. And how is my girl to-day?"

He was of angular figure and restless movement. Rather like a big bird with a sharp nose and bright round eyes. Jerky in speech and gesture, keen, observant, and full of vitality and quickness. He turned his back on every one and went to his patient. At the same moment Evelyn felt a touch on her dress and found Joe Cramp at her elbow.

"You have me," he said, "and I ain't going to run though I could. But I have something to ask for her sake—will you bide quiet and take the money that's there, and let me pay the rest some way? I will do it, honest."

The proposition took Evelyn's breath away, but she thought quickly, as she always did in emergencies.

"I wonder," she answered, assuming more severity than she felt, "that you dare make such a proposal. I have but to speak——"

The man breathed hard.

"Take me to the station then. I'll go quiet, I give you my word—and I've never broke that. But tell her afterwards—break it gently—it's only her I'm thinking of now. She don't know I've ever done—such as this. Indeed, it's

the first time ever I have, though you won't believe that. But can't you keep in a while—for her?"

There was a movement in the room, and the doctor's voice broke in upon them.

"Tell me no such tales, you little fibster, your cough is worse. I must examine that chest. Joe, step out, please."

The man shuffled his feet and turned with a despairing glance at Evelyn.

"I must go too," she said. "I will be with you at ten, Dr. Stansfield, to-morrow."

She came to the bed and took Amy's hand.

"You'll come again," the girl cried eagerly. "There ain't no need, of course," she added proudly, her hand on the gold; "but I would like to see you."

Evelyn stooped and tenderly kissed the hot forehead.

"I will come," she said, and then with a lump in her throat and smarting eyes hurried to the door. Joe was there already, and opening it, he stood back for her to pass.

"Eh, you Joe!" Amy cried, "take the lady out of the Nile, will you? It's getting dark, and this place ain't fit for the likes of her evenings. See her safe to the office."

"All right," he answered gruffly, and closed the door behind him.

It was pitch-dark on the stairs, which were narrow and winding, old and unsafe. Evelyn, groping her way to the banisters, suddenly thought how absolutely she was in this man's power. She knew his strength. The closed door behind her was thick, and no one was below. At this moment, too, she made a false step, stumbled over her dress, and lost her balance. Worst of all, the banisters which she clutched to save herself were broken, and she must have had an ugly fall had not a supporting arm and hand caught her, and placed her on her feet.

"Lean on my shoulder," a voice said in the darkness; "I'll go before."

She obeyed, smiling involuntarily at her position, and thus supported, safely descended the two flights of stairs to the ground floor. There was a long passage here, and then the

dimly-lighted street. No one in sight; the coast was clear. Yet as Evelyn followed her thief down the steps he stood still and waited for her.

She tried to collect her thoughts, which were now a little scattered.

"Will you walk with me?" she said to him.

"Amy told me," he answered curtly.

Evelyn turned to the left and walked fast. He kept pace a few moments in silence, then addressed her in a matter-of-fact tone.

"We've took the wrong turn."

"I think not; I know my way."

"The station is in Old Street, to the right."

"I'm going to my office; not to the police."

He made no rejoinder, but she fancied she heard him give a sigh of relief.

"You asked me a question," she said after a few moments, "a question I have not yet answered. Let us talk about it."

He drew a quick short breath.

"Yes, miss."

"If you mean what you say, why don't you pay all the money back? You stole ten pounds."

"I had to give half to a pal."

"But you were alone."

"There was another in the job."

"I must know who it is, please."

"What, me blow on a pal? 'Tain't likely."

The man's tone was frankly contemptuous.

"Then he will get off."

"He would anyhow."

"No, if you were charged the police would find him out."

The man laughed mirthlessly.

"The perlice find *him!* No, lady, they knows too much for that. If they takes me, I'll get it all."

Evelyn frowned in great perplexity.

"I have no right," she said slowly, "to condone your offence. I think my Committee will insist that the law must take its course; I think they ought."

The man said nothing. They turned the corner of Crisp Street now, into a darker, narrower place, and at this point came upon a crowd of people gathered round two drunken, quarrelling women. It was a nasty crowd, and Evelyn in a moment found herself surrounded by unpleasant faces sharply peering at her. A harsh jeering laugh came at her elbow, and a word she could not catch. A costermonger who had imbibed a few glasses on his way home and was in a lively mood had pushed up his barrow to the curb, and before she was aware of his intention slipped an arm about her waist. Even as he did so, however, he received a blow that knocked him head over heels on to his barrow. There was a jeer from two or three in the crowd, and the coster regained his feet with a curse, full of fight.

"That was me, Tim Venner," said a voice which Evelyn scarcely recognised as her companion's. "The next will break your jaw—or any other near enough. Be off."

At this threat the coster, with a gasp of surprise, dived for his barrow and fled with it like a rabbit, while the crowd surged back in respectful silence, and Evelyn and her protector went their way in peace.

When they were alone again, Evelyn turned and faced her companion under a lamp.

"Thank you," she said earnestly; "you have kept your word indeed. Will you come to the office and meet the gentleman you saw there this morning, and another friend of mine?"

Joe gave his shoulders a queer shrug.

"I don't want another doing."

"My friend doesn't hit a man who is down."

He thought a moment.

"I'll come," he said at last, "and chance it."

They turned to pursue their way, when some one who had been standing on the other side of the street watching them came up and called Joe Cramp by name.

He was a lean elderly man with colourless eyes and a flat nose.

"You, guv'nor!"

There was fear in Joe's voice. Evelyn felt a foreboding that this was an untoward meeting.

"Me, Joe," was the reply. Then, as if seeing Evelyn for the first time, he raised his hat. "You are with this lady?"

"Yes," Evelyn said in a significant tone, "we are on urgent business."

"That is unfortunate. I have been looking everywhere for my young friend. He must come with me."

The calm assurance and authority in the stranger's tone irritated Evelyn.

"I fear that our business cannot wait," she said, as quietly as she could. "Come, Mr. Cramp, I shall not keep you long."

She moved a pace onward, but the man, who was directly in her way, did not step aside, and Joe stood still.

"Can't I meet ye later, guv'nor?" he said in a troubled, uncertain voice. "You ain't in any hurry for an hour, I suppose?"

"I am never in a hurry," the other replied, making no movement, except to show two rows of prominent teeth in a sneering smile. "I am only going to No. 18 with you!"

He gave a low, disagreeable laugh, which made Evelyn tingle all over. To her disgust Joe Cramp lowered his head and nervously kicked a stone into the road.

"I must go, miss," he muttered.

"You told me you never broke your word."

"I won't," he answered. "I'll pay, just as I said."

"How am I to believe a coward?"

Evelyn spoke with more contempt than she felt, and heard him swear under his breath.

"If it was daring him only, you'd see," he growled. "I'll come to-morrow, sure."

"The Committee meets at four."

He gave a sigh which was half a groan.

"We'll leave it at that."

Then he turned, and without salute or further sign trudged away, the thin man at his side.

When Evelyn reached her office she found Giles and Mr. Glynn on the point of leaving it.

"At last, miss!" exclaimed the old agent. "We was just off to raise the town."

There was an implied reproach in the old man's tone as well as solicitude, which Evelyn would have resented at ordinary times. To-night, however, after what she had gone through, she found it welcome, and when they came back into the office and the lights were turned up, and she sat comfortably in her office chair to tell the story of the afternoon, the sight of these two strong men gave her rest and comfort. In truth the encounter with the man who had carried off Joe Cramp had shaken her nerves. She began by describing him, so far as the dim gas light had enabled her to see him, as minutely as possible. The men looked at one another meaningly, and Giles rubbed his great hands slowly together, thrust them into his pockets, and nodded at John.

"They'll be locked up," he said oracularly, "in two hours —both."

"Both!" Evelyn cried. "Have you discovered the second thief?"

"Ask Mr. Glynn," Giles answered, with a dry smile. "It's the man you was talking to just now—Percival Nyne."

"Then Joe has deceived me after all."

She spoke with a note of keenest regret.

Giles gave one of his grim chuckles.

"It's a lesson, miss; if you'll excuse me saying so. The worst of ladies in this work of ours is that they just see what them people means them to see. Take that girl. I don't say much against her yet; but she ain't all she might be. I saw a man I know who knows No. 49 Crisp Street well, and he tells me she's a bit of a sly-boots. But take Crisp Street gells as they go, she's better than most. Her aunt—who ain't her aunt any more than I am—that Mrs. Prickett, is what we call an egg, a real bad egg. Joe Cramp—I found his name out an hour since—is a hopeful young fighting man evenings, and by day a locksmith, out of work—a bad com-

bination when he begins thieving. There again, though, I ain't going to be too hard in judging. If the Nile weren't the Nile, and Percival Nyne—him you saw—the King of the Nile, Joe Cramp might have grown up straight. He's never fought on the cross, and I can't find that he's ever been in trouble before to-day, but what I do hear—and you have proved it, Miss Grey—is that Nyne has him by the neck, and that means he'll never quit stealing now, whatever he did before. The only thing to be done is to cop Nyne with him and try to get a conviction against both."

Evelyn sighed.

"If we must, we must. But it will be the death of that girl, ill as she is; and Joe—you will laugh at me, I know, both of you," glancing at John and becoming aware for the first time that his eyes were intently fixed upon her face—"but I believe in him, in spite of all you say. A woman is a better judge of a man sometimes than another man, and that young fellow is not a thief by nature. He has been led, but unwillingly led; he would be honest if he dared."

Giles shrugged his shoulders with a sigh.

"That's what he tells you, miss. Not but what you may be right. But, you see, the hand that has pulled him down is too strong for us. There's nothing we can do will loose the grip of Percival Nyne."

"It must be done."

John had spoken, and in his tone was a sharp vibration which made Giles look quickly round.

"Excuse me, sir, you don't know Nyne."

"That will not take me long."

Giles gave a grunt of deep disgust.

"I would not dirty my hands with any of 'em, if I was you. It's a case for the police, I do assure ye"—looking from one to the other. "If I may make so bold, miss, that is what the Committee will tell you both to-morrow."

Evelyn sighed.

"You are quite right. The Committee with this evidence before them will certainly prosecute. And it is their money that was taken. The most we can do is to wait until they

know all the circumstances. But I suppose you would say this gives the birds time to fly, Giles?"

Giles chuckled.

"No. If I can read 'em, Master Joe will think you'll let him off, while Nyne don't know we have any information respecting himself. Leave it for the Committee, if you like. Why, if I meet the guv'nor to-morrow morning," the old agent continued with modest pride, "he'll pass the time of day, and it's ten to one but he shake hands with me."

The old man laughed softly at the humour of the situation.

"You see, sir," he said to John, "I know 'em all, and they know me. I don't interfere with none, because it's my business to get information. Many's the time I have had the tip from the 'guv'nor,' as they call him, about a fellow applying for relief; and he's never misled me yet. But for all that he's a bad 'un, through and through. And if we could by hook or crook ever get him out of the Nile, it would be the best day's work we'd ever done."

John began to bite his moustache thoughtfully.

"That will be our first bit of work."

Giles gave a scornful sniff.

"Lor' bless you, sir, nothing will do that. He collects the rents of half Crisp Street; he lends money to thieves. He is landlord of them courts they call 'the Warren.' Why, he holds the whole Nile tight as tight. Joe will swear on his oath that Nyne is not in it; you'll see."

"Yet the Committee will prosecute. Why?"

"Why? Because if the Nile knew Miss Grey had been robbed and we'd let the man off as did it, she'd never be safe a moment; and her safety—you will excuse me for saying—is more important than anything else to the Committee, sir. You'll agree to that."

"I agree to that," John said very quietly.

"Nonsense, Giles," Evelyn cried. "My safety has nothing to do with the matter. It was my own carelessness that was the first cause of the robbery. He wanted money badly, and saw ours, and was tempted and fell. I am not in the least afraid of the Nile or of Mr. Percival Nyne. Of course

I am bound to defer to the Committee, but they have not heard the whole case yet. Wait till to-morrrow, please, before you do anything with the police." She began to put away her things, while Giles cleared up his table in the other room and counted the letters he had to post. John stood still, thinking.

"The Committee here," he said suddenly, "is boss, I mean master, of the situation?"

Evelyn locked her desk.

"Certainly," she said with emphasis, for there was a question in his tone, "the Committee governs everything. They meet every Tuesday afternoon, and all that I do, and all business that comes in during the week, is reported to and decided by the Committee."

John coughed with a dubious sound.

"Then the fate of Joe Cramp will be decided by what they say, to-morrow."

"And Amy's too."

"They will order prosecution?"

She sighed.

"I think they must—on Giles's evidence."

She was about to wish him good-night, when she suddenly remembered something.

"Mr. Glynn, I have never thanked you for—this morning. It is rather late to do so now, but please believe that I am really grateful."

She proffered her hand with frank appeal.

John gave a quiet laugh as he held the slim fingers.

"If you had thanked me," he said, "you would have spoilt it. I will tell you why some day, unless Giles does on his own account."

At this Giles, who was leaning against the folding doors watching them, said quickly:

"Not I. You be the kind of gentleman, Mr. Glynn, whose affairs I leaves alone. Miss Grey, you are tired out."

He spoke with the tenderness of an old friend.

In reply Evelyn gave him a smile, which John thought the sweetest he had ever seen.

"I'm only worried, Giles."

"You be thinking of that little girl."

"And of my poor cavalier. I am very much afraid I shall plead for him to-morrow with the Committee. And as for you, Giles, if you had seen how he helped me down those stairs and knocked down that wretch, you would plead harder than I."

Giles gave a sympathetic grunt.

"I should, miss. I do love a man who fights, that's the truth."

He spoke with an earnestness that made them both laugh.

A few minutes later, when the men were standing alone together in the street outside, John laid a hand on the agent's arm.

"Will you dine with me this evening?"

Giles wondered what was in the wind.

"I'd be proud to, sir."

"After dinner I have a favour to ask."

"Anything I can do, sure."

"I want you to take me to see Percival Nyne."

Giles drew a long breath.

"You means to tackle him to-night?"

John nodded.

Giles looked into his companion's face long and earnestly, tracing every line in it with shrewd experienced eyes, which had watched and judged all kinds of men for nearly fifty years. Then, slowly and gradually his mouth relaxed and his great body began to shake with internal laughter.

"I might have known it," he said, addressing an innocent lamp-post in a tone of intense conviction. "I did know it in my mind, and before a month is gone every man in the Nile will know it too, that's sure!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE TRAIL

"You have known the Nile many years, Giles," John said, as they settled themselves in the corner of a modest restaurant in the City Road.

"Forty, sir. It was my first beat when I came here a lad from the country."

"And Nyne and his friends——"

"Ah," Giles interposed, "I'll tell you something. I have been a-watchin' the guv'nor pretty close this long time for the police. That's why I knows so much about him. You see, sir"—here Giles became confidential—"though I don't talk about it, as it might look presuming, seeing I were only a sergeant when I left the service, Mr. Samuel Smith, the Superintendent of Police of this Division, is a bit of a pal of mine, and we often talks over things, and most of all this 'ere Percival Nyne. I should say to start with that Smith is the right sort. The Commissioners think no end of him; he's what I call a just man, and honest. There ain't one of all the six hundred men he has under him in his Division could say he's ever favoured any or ever spared any either. Then he has no pride; not a bit. There's hardly an evening I don't meet him, and while he goes his rounds we talk of the Nile. He's for ever asking about the guv'nor. You'll have a good friend in Smith, Mr. Glynn."

John immediately expressed a proper desire to meet the great man; but privately he cared for Giles more than any Police Superintendent. The afternoon they had spent together had been deeply interesting to John. There had been inquiries to make of many kinds, of many people, and Giles was in his element. Wherever he went—whether to a house to ascertain from the resident landlady or a friend the

character of departed tenants; or to a tradesman to discover his opinion of people who had referred to him for a recommendation; or an employer to discuss the merits of a discharged "hand," or a working man to find out what sum weekly he would be prepared to allow his father if the society organised a pension for the old man—whoever he spoke to, or whatever the subject he spoke on, there was on his side a keen shrewdness and knowledge with perfect good temper and curiosity, and on theirs respect and friendliness. Many were old friends, while not a few tatterdemalions looked up sideways as he passed, with a grin of recognition and an "Afternoon, sir!" These gentlemen, it appeared, had been known to Giles in days past, too well. He remembered all of them, and could tell John the sentences they had undergone, and why, down to the minutest detail.

The experiences of the afternoon had given John infinite satisfaction. Certain ideas which had entered his mind since the talk with Mr. Brooke, and with which the incident in the office had in no way interfered, grew more distinct and hopeful every hour, as he went the rounds with Giles. In this man who knew every one and was known by all he had a weapon ready to his hand. He had only to learn himself from such a teacher, and develop his plans as he gained knowledge, and the notions he had formed would soon begin to work themselves into a practical scheme.

But the story Miss Grey had to tell that evening threw his schemes into the background for the time. John had said little while she had discussed the position with Giles, but his thoughts had been very hard at work. By the time he asked Giles to introduce him to Percival Nyne, he had formed a plan of campaign, subject only to such modifications as Giles's superior local knowledge might render necessary. He had first, however, to find out how far Giles was prepared to go.

"I ought to apologise for keeping you out late," he said, ordering for dinner everything that was on the menu-card in succession. "You work hard all day; you ought to rest in the evenings."

Giles looked sharply up.

"How about yourself, sir?"

"I work for amusement. My time's my own."

Giles coughed sceptically.

"H'm, there ain't likely to be anything amusing about baiting Percival Nyne; and if you'll pardon me for saying so, I think you know that well."

"It will not amuse you," John said gravely. "That is why I apologise for troubling you. I have my own reasons for taking pleasure in hunting this man down and pulling out of his clutches, if I can, this lad Joe Cramp. But with you it's different. For instance"—sipping his soup—"I guess I shall not be in bed to-night at all. There is so much to be done smartly in these matters straight away, one has to be quicker than the other man every time; and from what you say and Miss Grey saw, this man is very quick. So"—he laid a hand on Giles's knee and smiled—"I say again, I will not pull you into this. Tell me where to find this Nyne, give me leave to consult you from time to time, and leave it there."

Giles laid down his knife and fork. "Thank'ee, sir," he said, in a quiet, dry tone, "but supposing, 'for sake of the argument,' as the lawyers say, I don't want to leave it there. Supposing," his tone quickening now, "I had reasons of my own for downing this Nyne, the pest of the Nile. Supposing even I would give something to see that young rascal Joe have a chance to keep his word to Miss Grey. And suppose I ain't that old, Mr. Glynn, or that weak, as to be afraid of late hours, or Percival Nyne neither, how then, sir?"

John smiled.

"Then, partner, instead of one man to deal with, Nyne will have two, and one of those—you—worth a dozen or a score. But before that partnership is sealed will you tell me your reason for coming in this way with me? You felt differently a little while ago."

Giles chuckled joyously. His face was beaming now, his eyes full of mischief.

"I'll answer in two words, sir: Miss Grey. She be as anxious to see that thief lifted out and the gell helped as if they were her own family. She'll worrit and fret over it as only a woman can do over them things. Now I can't stand her fretting, sir, no more than if she were my own daughter. There is nothing I would not do for her, bless her heart, though,"—he pulled up a moment, and his eyes became keener than ever—"it don't appear to me as if I were alone in feeling that."

John met the look the old agent gave him, and came to a resolution.

"You are not, Giles. There is a man who would give his soul to save Miss Grey from a finger-ache. That is why I am in Relton now. I owed my life to that man once, and wish to clear the debt, or part of it. I tell you this because you might not understand otherwise. He does not know, and must not, partner."

He held out his hand beneath the table. Giles took it respectfully, and then wrung it, his keen old eyes suspiciously moist at the corners.

"Thank ye, sir." Then a troubled look came into his face. "I knows the gentleman you mean, well. Will you pardon me if I say a word on his affairs?"

"Speak right out."

"He's a man I like, is Mr. Brabant, a straight-speaking, straight-dealing, well-plucked young gentleman; but Miss Grey will never have him, sir, and I'll tell you why. She is too strong in the will. Such as she never falls in love with men they're bound to rule."

John frowned thoughtfully.

"She will never let a man rule her, Giles."

Giles's lips twitched, but he covered his mouth with his hand.

"Have ye ever had much to do with the ladies, Mr. Glynn?"

"No," John answered seriously. "That is the worst of it now. I am scouting a strange country."

Giles rubbed his chin.

"You'll excuse me having asked such a question. That's just how I judged it was. Well, there's one thing sure, sir, by the time you've worked in our Society three months you'll know that country well."

They had finished their dinner, and John now ordered coffee and cigars. He made no reply to Giles's prophecy.

"If I am right," he said, "the first thing to do to-night is to follow the trail of Nyne and Joe Cramp. Miss Grey heard Nyne say No. 18. Do you know what he meant?"

Giles chuckled. "Upon my word, Mr. Glynn, I never thought you'd caught that. It was rare sharp. Yes. He means 18 Crisp Street, a milk shop kept by one Tom Symes, a prize-fighter, called the eighty-one-tonner. We might go there and see that bloke."

John nodded.

"I have heard of Symes on the other side from John D. Sullivan."

Giles gave a laugh like a schoolboy. "What! You know Sullivan, the champion of Ameriky?"

"I ought to," John answered, with a rueful smile; "he put my nose out of joint twice." He rubbed that feature pensively. "But I will say this, there is no meanness about John: he had a surgeon on the spot who knew his business. It was only a temporary inconvenience to me."

Giles breathed hard, and rubbed his hands.

"Lord bless me, Mr. Glynn, but that is worth anything now. Get it known in the Nile that you've fought the American champion——"

"I did not fight; it was a friendly spar; I do not want it known," John said abruptly. "My notion is the opposite. I may be wrong, but I would lie very low first of all. My idea is that I should come in just as a friend of yours from the States. Let me stand by and measure Tom Symes and the rest on the quiet. As opportunity comes I could tighten the lines, but I want to meet them all, and Nyne himself if I can, without their measuring me."

Giles nodded thoughtfully, and was silent for some moments. Then he drank his coffee and buttoned up his coat.

"I sees your lay, sir. It is the right one. The deepness in the guv'nor can only be met by deepness. Never show your teeth, as the saying goes, until you are ready to bite. Shall we come? I don't want to leave 'em too long."

They were not far from Crisp Street, and as men do who have hard and difficult work before them, they walked very leisurely.

"We must not see Nyne himself too soon," Giles said, "or he will get suspicious. Above all, if Joe is with him you must keep away, or the gaff is blown. Not that I fears that. He'll have put the lad somewhere safe, that will be his first move, to get him off."

"I must find his hole somehow," John said, "and get in when Nyne is away."

"Aye, aye," grunted the old man, "all in good time. I think Tom Symes will be our 'nose,' as the police calls it, for that. But we must go slow. I fears Tom's wife most. She's foxy as the guv'nor himself, though not so wicked. Here we are."

They were in Crisp Street, and not far from the corner, near the City Road, was the shop in question, well lighted with gas. In the window was a large china cow, flanked by a smirking shepherd and shepherdess, and two baskets of eggs.

"You stand back," Giles said in a whisper as they crossed the road, "until I rams my stick upon the floor."

He entered with the breezy nonchalance of an old friend, and had hardly crossed the threshold before he gave his signal.

"Evening, missis," he said cheerily to a woman behind the counter, "Tom in?"

The woman nodded a greeting without answering. She had an account book in her hand, and appeared to be casting up figures. This finished, she glanced slowly from one man's face to the other.

"He went out, Mr. Giles, a half-hour ago."

Giles thanked her, and then sat comfortably down on a high stool, while Mrs. Symes served a small and dirty girl

with a penny lump of butter. His hands rested easily upon his stick, his chin upon his hands.

When the child had gone, he said meditatively:

"It is a strange thing, missis, I have known your husband twenty year, but never seen him out without that hat."

He pointed at one which hung behind a door at the other end of the shop.

The woman looked sharply round, but otherwise seemed in no way disconcerted. She had a plain, square, immobile face.

"He may have come in since," she said. "What did you want with him?"

Giles rolled leisurely off the stool. "Twenty year I have known Tom," he repeated, "and we have never fell out. We have always been good friends, Tom and me, so, missus, by your leave, I'll take a liberty to-night."

He crossed the shop in two great strides, and before the woman could prevent him, drew aside a few inches a heavy red curtain close by a door which led into some inner room.

He had only time to get a glimpse of what was going on within before the woman jerked it back and held it with both hands.

"That's our private room," she said, in a low, fierce voice; "you have no right to be prying there."

Giles looked steadily and not unkindly into her angry face. His own, John noticed, was very grim:

"Surely, ma'am, but I had a reason for it."

"What's your reason? Tell me, or I'll have him out to ask himself."

"No, you won't," Giles answered, in a soothing tone. "Not you, missis. He is in trouble, your husband, more than he knows or dreams. There's that a-hanging over him—Ah dear!" Giles paused and heaved a sentimental sigh, and walked back to his stool, where he seated himself, shaking his head.

The woman followed him with vindictive eyes, which yet had a latent fear in them and question. She leant against the curtain with folded arms.

"My husband is a honest and straight-living man, as you know well, and fears none. No more do I."

"That's right, missis," Giles said, in a tone of cheerful encouragement. "That's quite right. I like to see you take it this way. I respect you for it, I do, honest. But facts are facts. I tell you quiet, but before my friend here, who knows all, there's been a barney this morning that will knock spots off of certain people living in the Nile. We've come to see Tom, only him. None must know we are here, mind that—no one. I say we've come to Tom because he's always been a good friend to me, and I would keep him and you on the right road for what's to come. You follow my meaning?"

"I don't know what you mean," she snapped.

Giles laughed pleasantly.

"No more you do. But you will when I've seen Tom. We won't stay now," leaving his stool. "We'll call again. How soon will they have done?"

"I don't know what they're doing."

"That is well put, very well put. Then we must risk it. Only, for your own safety, missis, be sure that Tom alone knows I have called. A good evening to you."

He raised his hat with great politeness, and walked out, John before him.

The woman answered nothing, and made no movement until they were out of sight, then she peeped behind the curtain herself.

"Fools," she muttered, "fools. How did he know? It must be Nyne playing double. Devil!"

A step in the doorway, and a neighbour bustled in for some milk. Instantly Mrs. Symes was herself again, a quiet, weary-looking woman with a colourless face, and a soft, quick step.

Outside Giles led the way toward the City Road, and did not stop or turn until they were round the corner. He was panting with excitement, and when they were out of sight leant upon John's shoulder.

"We have run 'em all to earth," he whispered. "Now

what do you think I saw? There was a table with a red cloth, and a bottle of whiskey and glasses; there was the guv'nor himself sitting one side and on t'other little Ben Kipley, the smartest cracksman in the Nile, who teaches the young hands burglary. And between 'em the eighty-one-tonner, holding a bloke by the throat against the wall—a man with a bandaged head and a scar, just as you described. Joe Cramp, without a doubt. What d'ye make of that, Mr. Glynn?"

"Foul play," John said, with a snap, drawing his hands from his pockets and unconsciously clinching them.

"You're right, sir. It's the worst thing I have seen or known in forty year. It is what you might expect from Percival Nyne. But Tom, I would not have believed that he would stoop to that. Never! A downed man, too; only knocked out this morning. It makes me fair sick to think of it."

"Some day," John said very softly, half to himself, "I will make Tom Symes pay for that."

Giles looked round eagerly, then said, with a chuckle not pleasant to hear, "May I be there to see you do it."

"It speaks well for Joe," John said, after a pause. "He can face music, that boy. What is the next move?"

"Mine," Giles said between his teeth, "I shall take Tom Symes and put him through the mill. You shall hear."

John sighed.

"I must wait, then, for my turn."

CHAPTER IX

THE EIGHTY-ONE-TONNER

JOHN and old Giles waited at the corner of Crisp Street. They found a convenient doorway, which was in complete shadow, and from which they could watch No. 18 without fear of any one who left the house seeing them.

At the end of twenty minutes they saw three men emerge, and set off in different directions. One, a little man John did not know, crossed the road and went towards Nile Street. Nyne himself followed in the same direction, but did not cross the road. The last, Joe Cramp, came toward them and passed within a few yards of where they stood. His face was flushed, and he lurched slightly as he walked.

"See that," Giles whispered. "They have nailed the poor devil down to their counter and put him on oath. He's lost. The drink that's in him is just enough to muddle his head to-night, and make him sleepy. To-morrow Nyne's claws will be in him again, never to loose until he has got him tight, and has the power of getting him five years penal. That is the way, I am told, the guv'nor holds the Nile. He knows every gun in it, and what he's done. If they hold to him, he keeps his tongue quiet, and helps 'em. If they play against him, he goes to the police. He saw Joe with Miss Grey, and feared he was about to blow on him. He knows, too, that Amy Bent is honest. This doesn't suit the guv'nor at all. Joe must go deeper in the mud right under his feet; that's his plan. What's that, sir?"

John had touched his arm.

"Look," he said, "he is at No. 49."

While Giles was talking, John had kept his eyes on the lean figure shambling down Crisp Street, and when it went

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up the steps of the house past the corner, John counted the doors from the Nile.

Giles muttered an oath.

"Poor little girl! The old snake will bite deeply into her to-night. It gets worse and worse, Mr. Glynn."

"You think Tom Symes is our mark? I should have liked to follow Joe."

"No, no," Giles said with emphasis. "Leave him to-night. I'll make Tom give me his whereabouts. Come, they are all gone now. We must lay for the eighty-one-tonner quick, and get him away by himself. If I have any luck I'll work to the bottom of all this in an hour. Then we'll know what to be at. At present it's only speculation, and that is a thing I can't abide, Mr. Glynn."

A man stood behind the counter at No. 18, now in spotless shirt sleeves and a professional blue apron—an enormous man, with a mighty pair of arms.

"Busy, Tom," Giles said, "or can ye come out?"

His manner was bluff and frank. John saw that he was staring hard into the man's face.

Mr. Symes gave a grunt.

"I'm always busy, Giles, come to that. I can't come out to-night. How goes it?"

He held out a hairy hand with a hearty gesture. But his eyes were full of suspicion and he was frowning heavily.

"How's yourself," the old policeman answered. Then glancing at John, he said: "We hoped you'd come, Tom. This gentleman wishes particular to see you. You ain't come from America for nothing, Mr. Glynn. This is Tom Symes, the eighty-one-tonner."

John raised his hat.

"Mr. Tom Symes," he said, with an American twang, which nearly suffocated Giles, who was not expecting it, "I am proud to make your acquaintance, sir. I have a message for you. John D. Sullivan said to me as I was leaving New York, 'If you see Tom Symes, give him my best respects, and ask him when he is coming out to fight me.'"

At these words a wonderful change came over the big

man. The frown and the suspicion disappeared from his brow, and his broad face became one expanse of complacency and good humour. He shook hands heartily with John.

"Any friend of Sullivan's is right welcome. Hope I see you well, sir. Giles, your friend and you will step round with me. Just wait till I calls the missis, she's putting the little 'un to bed."

He began to divest himself of his apron, while John, obedient to a wink from Giles, talked about American boxers, calling each by his Christian name, thus giving indubitable evidence of genuine acquaintance with the New York fighting fraternity. By the time Mrs. Symes came down they were fast friends. John was now introduced, with all the honours, to the lady of the house, Mrs. Symes's face, the while, like a grey wall, expressionless almost to vacancy, with weary, absent eyes. She heard of her husband's altered mind about going out, an announcement made with obvious hesitation, without a murmur. The incident of half an hour ago seemed to have passed from her mind. Yet Kate Symes was not a woman to forget. Old Giles, who knew her well, was struck by this.

"How's the little girl, missis?" he said suddenly, just as they were leaving. "Better, I hopes?"

The woman's eyelids quivered, and they saw her shiver.

"No," she answered, moving some milk jugs noisily, and disappearing behind the counter.

Tom Symes heaved a huge sigh. "It's that hip again," he said, in his rough, hoarse voice. "There's an abscess. Dr. Stansfield comes to-morrow to open it."

There was a crash of falling milk cans, and then Mrs. Smyes's voice, hard and incisive: "If you must go out, be off quickly; I can't stay here for long."

At this hint Tom retreated with more haste than dignity. "Poor soul," he said, as they crossed the road to a public house opposite, "she's in a rare worrit. You won't believe me, Giles, but she's been crying her eyes out half the day to think the knife will be used to-morrow on the kid."

He spoke without much apparent feeling, and John's heart stiffened against him, though he knew it was only the callousness to all pain characteristic of the class to which the man belonged.

It was nine o'clock, and the "George" was full. Tom took his guests to a side door, and brought them by devious ways to a snuggery sacred to particularly privileged customers. But beyond the glass screen, which kept this compartment private, John could see a crowd of faces. The place was full of workingmen discussing politics and sport and local gossip, over pipes or cheap cigars, very much as their fellow creatures of another class were doing, at this time, in the bars of fashionable restaurants or in the smoke-rooms of their clubs. There was no drunkenness to speak of; there rarely is, for drunkards do not pay a publican. He looks on them as the abuse, and not the pride, of his profession. There was not much bad language either, and the liquor patronised was seldom stronger than "four ale."

A young lady, with resplendent yellow hair and a tired face, came for orders, which were given by Tom Symes. Healths were drunk: John Sullivan and the American Prize Ring, the English P. R., and Tom Symes himself. Then Giles pressed his foot against John's heel.

"We have business with ye, Tom," Giles said, wiping his mouth with an immense bandana handkerchief. "Important."

The prize-fighter cleared his throat and tried to look quite unconcerned, in which he signally failed.

"Ah, the missis said something," he answered, filling his glass again, "but I sez to her, sez I, 'all's right, old girl, Giles knows me.'"

"I does, Tom," Giles rejoined in a mild, indulgent tone, "and so do Sam Smith, the superintendent of police."

Tom raised his glass to drink, and they saw his great hand shake.

"What's on?" he muttered.

"Ah!" Giles said, more mildly than before, leaning his elbow easily upon the counter so that he might have a full

view of the big man's face, "now, that is just what you are going to tell us, Tom, if you please."

Symes's answer was something between a growl and an oath. "I have nothing to tell, and if I had, I should not blab to you."

"Oh, yes, you will, my man."

The other swore roundly and deep.

"If that's your talk, I'm off, Alfred Giles." He cast his glass down on the counter with a thump, and made a movement towards the door. But Giles stepped in between.

"No, you don't. Not a bit of it. Until I have done with ye—quite done—you'll stay here. That's what you will do."

The old man was like a lion fully aroused. His grey head was thrown back, and he had drawn himself up to his full height—he was as tall as the prize-fighter—his keen, rugged face alive, his manner strong and commanding.

"Listen to what I have to say," he thundered, "and then answer straight the questions I shall ask, or in one hour or less I tell Sam Smith everything I know, and if he knows what I've found out this night, God help ye, Tom."

He paused here, as if to give the other time to speak. But Tom said nothing. He looked sullen and dangerous, but was obviously quelled for the moment.

"I'll not play with ye," Giles went on more quietly. "This morning our office was broke into, Miss Grey assaulted, and ten pounds took from the safe. This evening, at half-past eight of the clock, I saw the man who done it, and the man who put him up to do it, and another, behind some red curtains in a shop across the road kept by one Tom Symes."

The prize-fighter's face turned a sickly yellow. "But I didn't know," he faltered, "I didn't know what they'd been at, that I can swear."

"Wait," Giles interposed sternly, "wait till I've done. I saw you holding young Joe by the neck, Ben Kipley, the cracksman, behind with a bottle in his hand ready to brain the boy, and Nyne putting you both on."

He paused to moisten his lips, which were dry with ex-

citement, but when the wretched Tom tried to speak he stopped him with a gesture.

"That's what I saw. Now I'll tell you what I am going to do. You know Smith, and you know me. It takes a lot to rouse either one of us, and Nyne thinks the police will never touch him. But once rouse Smith, and all the bullies and receivers in the Nile won't stop him. Shall I turn him loose, or shall I not? I don't rightly know"—Giles spoke very slowly now, as if thinking aloud—"that I ought to so much as hesitate. But for the sake of our friendship, for your wife's sake and the little girl, I will hold him, if you will give me what I need."

"What's that?"

The man was beaten down. He was sitting now, with hanging head, one hand nervously playing with his watch-chain, the other twisting an empty tumbler round and round. He had lowered his eyes, like some great dog thrashed into submission.

Giles looked at him critically.

"I want to know Nyne's lay, exact. I must have his plan, as he put it down to you and Ben. You must give me that, word for word."

The man shuddered.

"But I dursn't. S'elp me God, Giles, I dare not think of doing it. The guv'nor would have me picked in pieces if he got wind."

"He'll not get wind, unless you tell him."

Tom frowned.

"How do I know? You are close enough, that being your business; but your pal, what's he?"

"A friend of Joe, the boy you hold," John said, coming forward.

Tom gave a harsh, sneering laugh. "That pup! Who are ye getting at?"

"You."

The word was spoken in a tone that made the big man's fingers tighten.

"You have heard Giles," John went on quietly, "now

hear me. My business in the Nile is to pull that boy out of Nyne's clutch. I do not care what chances I take in doing it, nor what it costs. Giles has told you what he'll do if you don't come in with us. I say that if you will come in, and act squarely, I will insure you against all money loss, and protect you from Nyne in every other way. What do you say?"

Tom Symes shifted his feet uneasily, and lowered his eyes.

"Why, I say to you go ahead. I would like to see that lad out of Nyne's hands. I would, honest, and I'll help all I can. But leave me alone to do it my own way, see?"

To this question, spoken with sharp emphasis, John made no reply at all, but quietly buttoning up his coat, he strolled towards the door. "I quit, Giles," he said.

Tom jerked his head anxiously round, and looked at Giles.

"Where is he off to?"

"Home," John answered, in a slow, dry tone, "to write my friend John D. Sullivan and say I have met you. John will laugh for a week when he gets my letter, and so will every sport from New York to 'Frisco."

At this Tom Symes started to his feet, and with one stride was at John's elbow.

"What d'ye mean?" he demanded. "You tell me now."

His voice was loud and threatening. His great fists clenched, and he towered above John, in his wrath, five good inches. John put his hands from his pockets, and looked up into the grim face above him with a cool, reflective stare, while Giles remained at the bar and sipped his whiskey, smiling a slow, wise smile.

"I will tell you, friend," John answered nasally. "I write to John D. Sullivan, our champion, to tell him that the man whose portrait has been in every sporting paper in the States, the great British bruiser, Tom Symes, is after all a man of straw, a man without a heart."

The prize-fighter shut his teeth. "It's a lie," he snapped, "take it back or I'll do for ye."

"I shall tell him," John went on, without moving a muscle, though the prize-fighter's great body was swaying like a lion's before the spring, his face livid with passion, "I shall tell him why, and suggest that the New York illustrated papers publish two cartoons to prove it. One shall be the champion of England throttling a wounded boy, the other the same champion beat back to the ropes by a poor old skull-faced man."

He turned away with a nod, and was feeling for the handle of the door, when he was seized by the shoulders and forced back into the room.

"Stop," cried the prize-fighter, his voice fallen to a hoarse whisper, "stop, I say!".

He was choking with rage and shame, drops of perspiration on his forehead, his face black and swollen. "The guv'nor"—he paused. "The guv'nor—be—*damned!*"

He forced the words out one by one, his hands shaking as if he had palsy.

John's manner changed. "Do you mean that?" he said softly, holding out his hand.

Tom Symes flushed deeply. His eyes moistened, his lips quivered like a child's, and seizing John's hand, he wrung it until the knuckles fairly cracked.

"I means it. I'll come in with you. I'm ready to tell ye all."

It was now Giles's turn to shake hands. He did so heartily, but with a shrewd and watchful eye.

"That's better, Tommy. That's what I looked for from ye. But be very careful. Mr. Glynn here has something in his head that will hoist the guv'nor sky-high. There must be no doing things by halves or turning back."

Tom Symes sighed deeply.

"There will be no turning with me, Alfred, though if Nyne is pinched, and blames it on to me, I may lose my living, perhaps my life. Only those who lives here knows the guv'nor in the Nile. But I'll risk all, rather than be the laugh of Sullivan and them blokes in New York. I'd go to

the work'us, I'd almost sooner die. You have me now, or your friend has—proper. What's the lay?"

They drew up to the counter again, and held counsel, Giles questioning, Tom answering, John listening to both in silence. At the end, when Giles, in answer to a question from the prize-fighter, expressed himself satisfied, John drew out a pencil and notebook.

"They make Joe a cracksman, then, on Monday next? That's the 10th."

"It's Monday, right enough," Tom answered, frowning uneasily.

"Until Monday," John went on in a thoughtful tone, "Joe will be kept at Nyne's doss-house in Clerkenwell Close. It seems to me the guv'nor takes risks by waiting so long."

"Not he. Joe will never go a step without being watched. The deputy there, Pat Malony, is sharp as any rat. You'll have to get him off by force, and put the lad where Nyne can't find him. Even then it will be only for a time. As a weasel tracks a rabbit, so the guv'nor, if you gets Joe away, will run him down. He'll beat ye, mister."

Tom's nervousness was getting the better of his courage.

John carelessly put his book away.

"That girl," he said suddenly, "Amy Bent—Nyne may have trouble with her if she is honest."

Tom Symes gave a coarse laugh.

"If Amy gives trouble, so much the worse for her. Trust Nyne to handle a woman."

John coughed.

"I guess we will handle Nyne."

The prize-fighter shifted his feet uneasily. "Don't look at me like that. I ain't going to touch the girl. But mind, the guv'nor will have the Nile with him, Monday, to a man."

Here Giles interposed.

"Not quite, Tommy, not quite, my boy."

Symes's red face twitched.

"What do you mean by that, Alfred?"

"I mean that you'll be there, lad, you, the pride of the Nile—the great eighty-one-tonner himself—with us."

Tom gave a great laugh.

"You be clever, Giles, and no mistake. You do hit a man home, to be sure. Well, I'll be with you, of course, and if it comes to fighting, I suppose I'll be somewhere there or thereabouts. There, now, I must be getting back to the house, or Kate'll be coming for me. So long."

He shook hands warmly, with another big laugh, and went across the street to his shop, while Giles and John strolled away together to the City Road.

"Will the man keep his word?" John said suddenly, stopping short. Giles shook his head. "Ask me that question after Monday night, sir, not before."

CHAPTER X

THE WIT OF WOMAN

WHEN Evelyn and Joe Cramp left No. 49 Crisp Street, Dr. Stansfield threw off his overcoat and made a careful examination of Amy. He talked all the time in the intervals of sounding her, and made her laugh by a humourous forecast of what his face would be like if he were to box with Joe. When he had finished, he patted her hand as he said good-bye.

"You're better. Keep quiet, and think of where you'll go with this fortune of yours, or what's left when I've sent in my bill. Don't think of anything else, and stick to your bed. As you love Joe, d'ye hear, keep abed. Good-night, good-night."

He was out of the room in a twinkling, the quick, bustling little man, but paused in the passage until Mrs. Prickett joined him.

"She's feverish," he said, in a fierce whisper. "She's overdone. That's your fault."

"There now," cried Mrs. Prickett unctuously. "Didn't I think she was. If you'll believe me, doctor, that 'ere lady sits down and asks questions till my head was a-spinning like a round-about—and such questions," she added viciously, "no *lady* would ask 'em."

"Quite right she should," snapped the doctor, so close to Mrs. Prickett's ear that she jumped. "That lady will be the best friend Amy ever had. It's Joe's broken head that's done it. What's he been doing?"

"Eh, sir, how should I tell?"

"You may not tell, but you know, and so does your precious master, Percival Nyne. Now, listen to me. Amy

must be kept very quiet to-night. Let no one in, except Joe, for one minute. She'll fret if he does not come. No one else at all. You understand my orders?—no one."

"Indeed, doctor, I always does what you say."

"Except when you forget. Never mind, Mrs. Prickett," shaking hands cordially with her, "we all have our weaknesses. Mine is an irritable temper and a hasty tongue, and yours is gin of an evening. Good-night to you."

He rattled down the rickety stairs, whistling like a boy, Mrs. Prickett looking after him with her mouth open.

"Eh, but he is sharp, the doctor," she muttered, feeling for the handle of the door. "He puts me in a rare tremble. He do know so much, and makes no bones of saying it. But he don't harm ye. He spits it out to you—never to your neighbours."

Amy was cheerful enough after the doctor's visit. She made Mrs. Prickett bring a little linen bag which had belonged to her since childhood, and into this bag she dropped the five sovereigns one by one. She then tied the bag up very securely, and put it under her pillow.

Mrs. Prickett, who laid a claim for one of the sovereigns, was taken up very quickly.

"What! spend my Joe's money on food? You take that five shillin' out of the bottom of the tea-caddy, or, better still, pawn them new boots of mine. I shan't want them for long enough. This lot is for Joe and me to spend together, unless"—she gave a sudden sigh—"we saves it up for what's to come."

Mrs. Prickett whined and grumbled sorely, but at last went out, vanquished, taking the boots, to get a kipper for her supper, and medicine for Amy from Dr. Stansfield's dispensary, and perhaps a little "somethink" for herself.

Amy dozed, waiting for Joe to return. By-and-by she fell asleep, waking with a start as Mrs. Prickett came in with the kipper, the medicine, and some beef-tea Dr. Stansfield's housekeeper had made with her own hands. She also brought news of Joe.

"He's with the guv'nor," she said, turning her back and

poking up the fire. "They has some business on, so don't you worry. He'll be round here presently. He said so as I passed."

Mrs. Prickett, however estimable in other ways, was not a strictly truthful person. She had seen the men, and one of them had told her to expect him, but that one was not Joe. Amy, however, was satisfied for the time being, and took her beef-tea and her medicine and settled down for a nap.

"I hope he'll not be late," she said. After a minute or two she raised herself on her elbow. "What business is it he has with the guv'nor?"

"How should I know?" answered the old woman, now frying her kipper. "Somethin' good, be sure."

Amy lay back slowly.

"But I ain't sure, and that's what it is," she said. "He is too deep for me, is Mr. Nyne, and has cold fingers and sharp nails. He's for all the world like a great tom-cat. He gives me the creeps."

Mrs. Prickett made no reply. She was never an argumentative person, and just now had her own reasons for wishing the girl to sleep. So she kept quiet, and steadily ate her supper, rising presently when Amy's eyes closed, to take a small glass bottle out of her dress and uncork it. It was colourless, and had a faint, sickly smell. Mrs. Prickett poured it in her tea.

Amy slept soundly for some time, while Mrs. Prickett disposed herself comfortably in an arm-chair before the fire and dozed. Thus two hours passed, and then a gentle tap came upon the door. Amy heard it first—she was sleeping lightly—and was up in a moment, believing it was Joe. When the thin figure and white face of Mr. Nyne entered instead, she gave a start and shiver, as if she had seen a ghost, and instinctively covered her face with the bedclothes until only her eyes were visible.

Mr. Nyne was not unlike a ghost to-night. His foot-fall was soft and noiseless, and after one sharp glance at Mrs. Prickett, who was snoring musically, he stalked with

long strides to the bed, and, hat in hand, looked down with his round, unwinking eyes into Amy's face.

"Well, little girl," he said softly, "I am late coming, and feared you would be sound asleep. But I had to come."

He drew a chair and sat down. His eyes never left her face.

Amy's lips began to quiver, but she kept quite still.

"That means that you brings bad news, guv'nor."

He nodded, and began to stroke his mouth and chin with one hand, a way he had which always made Amy think of a cat licking its whiskers.

"It's very bad news," he rejoined, in a tone as unemotional as the drip of cold water. "Will you have it now, or wait till morning? It will keep."

A hot colour swept over the girl's face, and she pressed the clothes hard beneath her chin.

"It won't. If it is about Joe it won't."

"Very well, very well," purred Mr. Nyne. "Have your own way, my dear. Yes, Joe's in trouble, I'm sorry to say."

He paused, and, stooping, rested his chin in both hands, his elbows on his knees.

Amy began to tremble all over, but with a great effort calmed herself and kept still.

"Locked up, you mean?"

"Not yet. No, not yet."

"Then why ain't he here?"

Mr. Nyne coughed significantly.

"A very natural question. You will not see him for some days, perhaps longer still. I am here instead."

There was a sound at the other side of the room. Mrs. Prickett was awake. She jumped up when she saw the visitor, and came forward clucking apologies like a startled hen.

Amy cut her short.

"Auntie," she said, "Mr. Nyne is come to talk to me, not you. Take that money out of the tea-caddy and go and get something for yourself—what you please—but don't come back for an hour. D'ye hear me?"

There was a strange, feverish decision in the girl's tone. She was giving orders which she intended to have obeyed. She had never spoken in such a tone before. The old woman looked at Nyne askance, but he gave her no sign. So she took the money and put on her bonnet, and went out muttering.

"Now, guv'nor," Amy said, as the door closed, "I am ready to hear all."

They made a strange pair; the hard-faced man of sixty, the pretty, dark-eyed girl. Yet in a way they were alike. Both were Relton bred; both knew the world and all its badness; both had sharpened their wits for a struggle for a man's soul.

Amy had heard of Percival Nyne since her childhood. She had not thought much about him, for until now she had classed him with the rest of the outside world, and a London work-girl in such a place as Relton is perhaps the least squeamish of mortals about what does not concern her nearly. But she knew the man, and now that he came with tidings of her lover, and said he represented him, she remembered all that he was and all that he had done.

Percival Nyne saw that she was on her guard. With some people he would have beaten about the bush, professed virtue, friendship, and the rest. Under the look Amy gave him he came to the point at once.

"There is not much to tell. Joe has needed money bad, and to-day he thieved, perhaps not for the first time. But this time he was caught. It is a bad business. He assaulted a lady and took ten pounds."

"What lady was it?"

"The secretary of that Society in Critchett Place."

The colour left Amy's face until it was white to the lips. "The Organisation lady, you mean?"

"That's it."

"Was this to-day?"

She could scarcely articulate the words, but with all the force that was in her she fought for self-control. Nyne saw nothing.

"This morning, before one."

"Have they put the 'tecs on him?"

"Of course," he said slowly. "That's why he told me."

She closed her eyes a moment, and, seeing for the first time how white she was, he thought that she had fainted. But at the movement he made she opened them wide.

"Have you anything more, guv'nor?"

He pretended to pick up his hat.

"That's enough this time, my dear."

"I said I wanted to hear all."

He rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"How much did you know of this?"

"Nothing."

"That won't do. You saw him to-day."

"I tell you," Amy said in a low, mechanical tone, "I knew nothing."

"Then he must have lied."

She bit her lip hard, and then said in the same tone:

"What do you think?"

"He told me he did. But the lady was here, so it must have come out."

"It didn't; and now, tell us the rest."

Mr. Nyne paused and rubbed his chin many times before he replied. This interview so far had taken an unexpected turn. No tears, no hysterics. No moans or wails. Was she a thief herself? Had she another man? For once, the first time in his long, bad life, Percival Nyne was puzzled by a woman.

"There is worse to come," he said at last. "I spent two hours arguing with him. But it was no good. He would hear no reason, nor talk any. He joined a gang of cracksmen this evening, the worst in the Nile, and they have him, body and soul."

He spared her nothing, either in what he had to say or how he said it. In justice it must be added that had she sobbed or expressed in any way the grief and horror he expected it would have been different. Cold-hearted as Nyne was, he was not brutal to a woman unless he hated her. He

waited even now before he gave his last and deadliest thrust. But he waited in vain, for the face on the pillow was like marble. Only the eyes seemed alive, and he could not read their expression. When she spoke at last—and he obstinately kept silent until she did so—it was in a monotonous tone.

"What's drove him to all this?"

Percival Nyne rose, pushed back his chair, and prepared to go. He came close to the bed.

"You have. This is what he said: 'Amy is so blank straight'—I use his words—'that now I've fallen she'll never look at me again. That is why I've joined the lads, and gone the whole. I want you to tell her this. Say that I've disgraced her, and that she will never see me any more.' "

He had done his worst now. What would she say?

For an instant she looked up at him steadily, without any change in her white face. Then she raised her hands to her lips, and rubbed them as if she were trying to speak and could not. After a pause she said hoarsely:

"That's truth, is it?"

"Gospel truth. What do you want? Shall I try again to get him here? What am I to tell him?"

He saw her face quiver now, and her body tremble. But her voice did not rise or sharpen in its tone as she replied: "I want nothing, guv'nor, nothing at all. I've had—enough."

He rubbed his nose as if annoyed, and retreated slowly to the door.

"I shall see him in the morning."

But Amy had turned her face on the pillow. He could only see a tumbled mass of hair.

He opened the door softly, and put on his hat. Heavy steps were stumbling up the stairs—Mrs. Prickett's. She reached the top, and with a hiccough passed him and went in and slammed the door. She was dead drunk.

Percival Nyne looked after her with a smile, and then went placidly home to bed. He felt he had done a good day's work.

CHAPTER XI

MISADVENTURE

MRS. PRICKETT was not what is called in the Nile a drunkard, but there were times and seasons—about once in three months—when a thirst for that soft colourless fluid she put into her tea would seize her, and then she drank herself to insensibility. She was always quiet in her cups. She always did it in the evening, and had slept it off, more or less, by the next morning. Amy, accustomed to this sort of thing all her life, thought nothing of it. It was a disagreeable which must be put up with, like chilblains in cold weather. Between these bouts Mrs. Prickett was a person of regular habits, and frugal mind. She kept the place clean and neat, mended Amy's clothes, and "saw to her" generally. She was an office cleaner in the city, and earned ten shillings weekly all the year round, so was independent. For her services to Amy she lived rent free, and took "pickings." She was no relation to the girl, but "auntie" is a common term in the Nile for the elderly companion of a girl when there is no natural relationship. It committed those who used it to nothing, and was short and convenient.

This night Mrs. Prickett was worse than usual. She fell over the table, and nearly upset the paraffin lamp, in which case she would have set fire to the house. She caught her feet in the fire-irons, and took a header on to the hearth rug, banged her face black and blue against a stool, and finally lay, supine and helpless, and after some inarticulate groans and mutterings fell into a heavy, drunken slumber, from which no human power could awaken her that night.

Amy watched these gambols from the bed, but took no interest in them. She was in high fever, pulse and heart going at galloping speed, her skin dry, her head burning;

but her brain had never been clearer or her wits sharper. Every word spoken by Nyne, and all that he had meant, was perfectly clear and exactly comprehended, so much so that even the misery of the thought that Joe was a thief—her Joe, whom she had boasted time and again was the only honest man in the Nile—was put aside as a trifling matter beside the fear that her man was being entrapped now to his utter ruin.

There was a conspiracy to bring this about, and the guv'nor was the head of it. This Amy had settled in her own mind within five minutes of Mr. Nyne's entrance. A woman's intuition where her lover's safety is involved is swift and sure, and in all her distress of mind, though her nerves were beaten and stunned by the shock of the news, and she lay almost speechless with amazement and horror, she was measuring Percival Nyne. What his motive could be she knew not, nor cared to inquire. It is one of the elements of active strength in such a mind as Amy's that in a crisis nothing but the issue of the moment seems of any importance.

All Amy knew—but of this she was certain—was that some one, probably Nyne, had tempted Joe to rob that office, and was now, with others, working to induce him to commit a far more serious crime, which would drag him down to the level of those "Lads of the Nile" whom she knew—none better—were the scum of the earth. The message from Joe she did not for an instant believe.

Her soul cried out against this horror as she lay thinking by the dim lamp-light, Mrs. Prickett snoring on the floor. How to prevent it? There was only one possible way. She must see Joe himself, and at once. The idea had entered her head while Nyne was talking, and when he asked whether she had no message for Joe it became a fixed determination. The man intended to keep them apart. He had succeeded by some means in preventing Joe from coming to her. The object of his own visit, or one object, was to prevent any chance of her going to or getting at Joe.

"He knows how I hate a thief," she muttered aloud, sitting

up in bed and beating the clothes with her hands, being now too excited and feverish to be still. "He says to himself, 'give it her straight enough and hard enough, she'll sicken of him, or if they do meet she'll give him what-for in a way as will set him back worse than all.' That's what he thinks, the old sting-worm. But he don't know, oh, he don't know. And now, to start. There ain't one moment to lose."

She got out of bed, walked to the table, and turned up the lamp. Then, for a moment, she paused. It hurt her to breathe, and her head was sick and giddy, for she had not been on her feet for three days, and had suffered much pain and weakness. How could she go out into the cold night? Had she the strength at all? And if she had for the time, what would happen afterwards? For a moment she hesitated. She was not blind to the danger of consequences. But she was not thinking of these. The only thing that she debated was whether she had strength to get through the night and do what had to be done.

"He'll be in some doss-house, likely," she muttered, still thinking aloud. "How am I to find it, and when found get in? I'll have to take a man with me. Who is there to trust?"

She sighed, and her head drooped, and it seemed as if she would give it up. But at that moment a new thought came. She pressed her hand against her heart and set her teeth.

"I will," she cried. "I must walk till I drop. If I remind him about *that* he'll never go away for me to bear the trouble all alone. He's forgotten me for a minute. Joe, Joe, to think you could forget at all!"

She gave a fierce little sob of reproach, and then, tossing back her hair, hunted out her clothes from various corners of the room and began to dress. It was a slow and painful business. Once a coughing fit came on which nearly choked her, but after resting a few minutes she persevered again, and at last succeeded in getting on her clothes. By this time her energy of purpose and the cudgelling of her brains necessary to conceive some practical way of finding Joe had made her forget her physical weakness for the time. The giddi-

ness had gone, the cough did not return; her breath, though still painful, seemed easier, while the feverishness which was upon her quickened her thoughts and ideas and made action a relief.

She closed the door without locking it, leaving the lamp burning. If she had any power left with Joe, she hoped to make him come back with her to lay plans. The mere thought of this, now, as she stood on the dark landing and felt her way to the stair-case, gave her strength and courage. True to her faculty of concentration, she had ceased to remember that Joe had ever done anything to be ashamed of. Her mind was fixed solely upon the hope of seeing him and claiming him as her own, bringing him back, dragged from the clutches of Percival Nyne. Nothing else mattered now.

When she reached the street a cold wind was blowing. It struck her on the face, and was drawn in with her breath, and made her shiver and cough. She was not well clad, and had on an old pair of boots—Mrs. Prickett had pledged the new ones—and felt the wet pavement cold and clammy under her feet. But she was in no mood to hesitate now. Bracing herself to meet the wind, and thrusting her bare hands into two tiny pockets in the jacket she wore, and burying her chin in a poor little collarette of fur, she hastened down Crisp Street.

The plan Amy had formed was to enlist the sympathy of the only man she knew likely and able to help her, induce him to escort her to the place where Joe might be lodging, and having found Joe bring him out to her.

The plan had the virtue of simplicity, but unfortunately its success depended solely upon Amy's capture of her man, who was no other, as it happened, than Mr. Tom Symes.

The clocks were striking eleven as Amy left 49, and at that precise moment Tom was putting up the shutters of his milk-shop preparatory to retiring for the night. He had just returned from the "George."

Tom listened to what Amy said sympathetically enough, and having the chivalry of all strong men for a woman in

distress, and being, besides, at this time strongly under the influence of Giles, he might have seriously considered risking even the vitriol of the "Guv'nor's" vindictiveness and pulling Joe out of the doss-house for Amy then and there. But at the very moment when Amy was saying her last words on the matter, Mrs. Symes came upon the scene.

Mrs. Symes and Amy were not on the best of terms at any time. Both had sharp tongues, both knew enough of each other's private affairs to be able to use their tongues with effect. To-night they were at their worst. Amy was ill and overwrought; Mrs. Symes miserable over her sick child, and on tenter-hooks with anxiety concerning the interview of her husband with Giles. As a last straw, these words from Amy which Mrs. Symes overheard were abuse of Percival Nyne, a person for whom she had a curious respect and a very wholesome dread. The result was a quarrel, which might have come to blows, had not Tom, who had the true fighting man's detestation for "scraps," gently but firmly inserted his arm round his wife's waist at the critical moment, and swinging her off her feet, in spite of struggles, carried her, as a nurse bears a screaming child, into the shop, shutting the door upon Amy, with a pleasant good-night, which made his wife more angry than anything else.

Amy, left in the cold, dreary street, leant hopelessly against the wall. She felt broken-hearted and hopeless, and being very weak and ill, began to sob like a child. She was stopped by the sound of a rough voice, which made her start, and the touch of a man's hand slipped familiarly under her arm.

"Hello, hello! Amy Bent, out to-night all on your little own? So Joe's gone off with another girl. Oh dear!"

The voice was unpleasant and sneering in tone, but the face of the man who spoke was flushed and eager. Amy stiffened and tried to draw away, but the hand—a strong one—closed on her arm more tightly.

"What d'yer mean?" she exclaimed. "Not as I care, but when Joe hears he will want to know, and will make you tell him."

The man laughed with an evil snigger. He was a short, long-armed, broad-shouldered creature, with the coster's voice, harsh and strident with years of constant shouting, and a clean-shaven face, with features sharpened and hardened by a life of bargaining and petty over-reaching. It was Tim Venner, the enterprising person who had attempted a familiarity with Evelyn Grey earlier in the evening, and received condign punishment from Joe. That blow had given him a swelled lip and a sore mouth, matters which were to be remembered and written down in a private ledger of his brain as debts which, when opportunity came, must be repaid with compound interest.

An hour ago he had fallen in with a friend of his, Ben Kipley the cracksman, fresh from the conference at No. 18, who, by instructions from Nyne, had gone to a well-known beer-house—none other than "The Grapes," patronised by Mrs. Prickett—and informed a few of the "lads" in confidence that Joe was "wanted" for robbery and assault, and, it was piously hoped, was now prepared to qualify for the "profession." This was great news for Tim Venner, an old "flame" of Amy's, who had rejected his addresses in Joe's favour long ago. He had felt that he must waste no time in making reprisals. This chance meeting with Amy now was a climax to his good fortune. The girl's pale, tear-stained face told him that she was ill and worn out. Her voice, generally sharp and keen, was low and tremulous. She shrank away against the wall, but had not strength to jerk her arm from the grasp he had laid upon it, and they were alone in Crisp Street at eleven o'clock at night.

The heart of the little man swelled brutally within him. He had accosted Amy with intent to taunt and twit and sting her about Joe. Now a darker purpose possessed him, and he changed his tone.

"All right, deary," he said smoothly, locking her arm firmly in his, but refraining from taking any further liberty, "I'm joking, I am. Joe had a new girl, and a pretty one, with him when we happened to meet to-night, but I reckon he's not thinking of girls in the cells——"

Amy gave a little gasp and cry.

"They've took him?"

"A half-hour back. Bad job for 'im, too."

He coughed with hypocritical sympathy.

Poor Amy. Had she been herself, such a statement would have been greeted with a fire of cross-examination which would have knocked all force out of it in a minute. But to-night she was an easy prey. The inevitable reaction after her burst of nervous energy had set in. Her head was aching violently, and she began to feel faint and sick. She forgot, for the moment, whom she was with.

"Take me home, then," she said feebly. "It ain't any more good now."

Had Tim Venner been perfectly sober, the utter prostration and helpless misery of the girl might have appealed to him, and whatever designs he cherished for the future would have been postponed until she was more herself. But he had been drinking heavily with Kipley at "The Grapes," and was excited and merciless.

"I'll see ye home," he said softly, his arm now round her waist, his heart beating fiercely as he felt her lean against him. "We'll go home comfortable, we will."

They went quickly enough, Amy being half carried by the little man to the steps of No. 49. There he paused to get his breath. He was engrossed now with his evil purpose, and saw nothing but the white face on his shoulder and the pretty tousled hair. He noticed that the door was open.

A shadow passed behind him across the steps and paused there—the shadow of a man standing under a gas-lamp—but he did not see it.

"Amy," he said, in a hoarse whisper, "Amy, girl, I'm going to take you upstairs."

Amy was falling into the unconsciousness of utter exhaustion, but the fever in her blood had not quite gone, and at this moment she opened her eyes and stared up into his face.

"Is it you, Joe?" she cried. "Eh, you've come after all."

Then recognising the face, and the evil in it, gave a feeble cry and struggled.

"Let me go—you, Tim!"

He held her closely and laughed.

"Oh, no, Amy; oh, no. We're home, we is, and I'm coming up with you."

He bent his face down to her shrinking one and laughed again. Amy was so nearly spent that she could not free herself. But she gave another cry, louder, and turned her face away.

"You beast!" she moaned. "Let go! get away."

Tim sniggered.

"All in good time; but I'll take ye up first, and pay my respects to auntie."

He pressed forward and lifted her bodily in his arms. As he did so, she gave a low, shuddering cry.

There was a scrape of a foot upon the stone steps behind, and Tim felt hot breath upon the back of his neck, while at the same moment an arm was inserted under his chin.

"Drop her," said a strange voice, sharply, "or I'll break your neck."

Tim's blood curdled in his veins, for the arm which held him pressed his chin upward till he could feel his backbone crack.

"What's up with yer?" he gasped, hoping that Amy was too weak to contradict him; "she's my sister."

But he had made a mistake.

"You lie!" Amy cried hoarsely. "Mister, it's a lie!"

The hold upon Tim's neck tightened painfully, upon which he let Amy go like a hot coal, and with a swift, agile turn and twist of his body, freed himself and staggered back against the railings. A glance upward showed him that he was dealing with a man three times his size, and that he must run for it. It was a question whether he would get the chance. But the stranger had thrown out a hand to save Amy from falling, and Tim made a bolt past. His heart was in his mouth, for there was little room, and the other turned on him at the moment. For some reason, however,

he let Tim go, only delivering a kick which, striking the coster just below the middle of his back, sent him head-first into the gutter, where he buried his face in a soft, evil-smelling mud-heap. When Tim arose, gasping and choking, with a fearful pain in his back, he found his enemy half-way down the steps, as if in the act of following him, so with many muttered curses he limped away as fast as he could run.

Amy watched these proceedings sitting on the steps. The excitement of the rescue roused her afresh, though she was now too weak to stand."

"That's a settler," she coughed, as Tim plunged into his mud-heap. "He won't want any more."

When her deliverer turned back, she saw to her intense astonishment that he was a gentleman.

"Is your name Amy Bent?" he said, leaning on the railing and looking down on her.

"That's me," she answered, curiosity struggling with the faintness creeping over her again.

"You ought to be in your bed."

"Can't," she choked, trying to rise.

He laid a hand on her shoulder.

"Do you want Joe Cramp to see you like this?"

She started.

"You know my Joe? For God's sake, mister, help me find him. That's all I want."

"I must take care of you first."

"Me!" she exclaimed scornfully. "What's that! I tell you Joe is in danger. He's gone wrong, but if I see him, if he sees me, he'll leave 'em and come home. He will, I know he will. Who are you? You ain't Joe?" She was wandering again, and catching hold of the railings, raised herself to her feet. "No, I see you ain't—you ain't. Oh, Joey—Joey, it's cruel—not to come—for baby's sake!"

She tried to walk away, and even took a step forward. Then the collapse came, and she reeled and fell, insensible, into John Glynn's arms.

CHAPTER XII

A NEW ALLY

THE position of a man who finds himself, at the dead of night, in the worst street in London, with an insensible young woman in his arms, is, to say the least of it, embarrassing. It was a case for immediate medical attention, but where was a doctor to be found? Not in Crisp Street. There were the police. But John had reasons for avoiding the police. There was the girl's own home; but he had overheard the remark about the drunken aunt, and remembered from Miss Grey's account of her visit that there was no one else to take care of her. Tom Symes, the prize-fighter, lived near; but Tom Symes's wife was a woman he would not trust further than he could see her. He bit his lip hard and considered. The Hotel Metropole and Dick Brabant's lodgings at Hampstead were the only other places he knew in London. Neither offered a satisfactory solution of the difficulty. Plainly, there was only one thing to be done. He must risk it, and trust Mrs. Symes.

Ten minutes later the worthy Tom, deep in slumber, was shaken violently by his better half, and told to go down to the front door.

"There's some one knocking," she cried as he rubbed his eyes, "fit to bring the house down. I've looked out, and I believe it's a 'tec. So much for your new friends."

Tom was a heavy sleeper, but the magic word "'tec" wakened him more quickly than a douche of iced water. His heart gave a mighty thump, and he went cold all over.

Without a word he leapt out of his bed, and, throwing on some clothing, marched downstairs, his teeth chattering and drops of cold perspiration on his forehead.

When he saw John holding something in his arms, his breath came back to him.

"Why, what's this, then?" he exclaimed. "Lord, I thought you were—I don't know what!"

"Let me in," John said sharply. "Quick, man; it's life or death."

A very big man is seldom a ready one. Had Mrs. Symes opened the door instead of her husband, the chances are that, after all, the police-station, and afterwards the hospital, would have been Amy's resting-place that night. But as it was, before Tom had time to protest or stop him, John, pushing the door open with his shoulder, walked briskly into the shop with his burden, and requested Tom to light up and call his wife.

But there was no need for this. The prize-fighter had scarcely time to shut the door before Mrs. Symes came downstairs with a candle in her hand.

When she saw what had happened, her anger knew no bounds.

"Take her out," she cried, stamping her foot. "I don't care whether she's dying or dead, or what. I'll not have that drab in my place, nor you neither. Get out, both of ye. D'ye hear? Tom, you gapin' baboon, take him by the neck if you're a man and throw him in the street. As for her, I'll soon bring her to life, I will!"

She put her candle on the counter and sprang at Amy like a savage cat. But Tom Symes was awake now. He caught her by both arms and held her fast.

"Quiet, woman; quiet, I say. Now, mister," to John, "tell us what it means!"

John looked from one face to the other, studying both.

"I am very sorry," he said in a quiet, smooth voice. "But I found this girl lying ill lower down the street and brought her here, as your house was the only one I knew. She looks near death to me, and if Mrs. Symes will find a bed for her, I'll get a doctor."

"But we can't," Tom said before his wife could speak. "You must see that. She's nothing to us."

"Then I will go to the police," John said in the same quiet tone, "and get an ambulance. But it will kill her."

Tom shivered.

"I don't want the girl to die," he exclaimed.

John's manner grew quieter and colder still.

"It's for you to decide. If you can find room to keep and nurse her, you'll be well paid by the Society. If not, and she dies, I shall give evidence at the inquest that you and your wife have, by neglect, hastened her death. That is all I have to say."

The power of an argument, in nine cases out of ten, lies more in the way it is stated than in its logical force.

To Tom Symes, his nerves already shaken by old Giles and his knowledge that the man speaking now held more than one trump card against him, the cold determination of John's manner was paralysing. Even Mrs. Symes, though ignorant as yet of all that her husband had said at the "George," knew enough to be aware that this man had power for evil in his hands, and she had perception enough, having now cooled a little, to see that he was one who would not scruple to use it.

As a consequence, the attitude of husband and wife underwent a remarkable change.

"Let me look at her, Tom," Mrs. Symes said impatiently to her husband. "D'ye think I was a-going to hurt a thing that could not move, you gaby! Now bring that candle close, and light the gas. We'll soon see what all this comes to. Not much, I'll be bound."

Tom Symes went a step further than his wife.

"We'll keep her, come to that," he said officiously, "if it's to save her life. But it's so sudden-like. There's been no time to think."

"There is not much time," John said sternly, "if she's dying. Tell me where the nearest doctor lives——"

Mrs. Symes gave an exclamation.

"There, she's coming to. Tom, the brandy; she's nigh spent, poor thing, that's certain sure. Brandy, quick!"

The big man flew to a cupboard, while Mrs. Symes, with

swift, skilful fingers, loosened Amy's dress, and taking the spirit from her husband's hands moistened the stiff lips and then poured a few drops between them.

Amy sighed and opened her eyes. She was conscious of her surroundings, and at sight of Mrs. Symes's face gave a little moan of fear.

"Don't hurt me," she whispered. "I'm only lookin' for my Joe."

The heart of the older woman was touched. It was not a bad heart, though crusted over with much bitterness and a hard troublous life.

"There, there," she said softly, smoothing the girl's hair back from her forehead. "Don't you worry. We're friends now, you and me."

Amy stared at her bewildered.

"You speaks kind. I miscalled you, but I'll never do it any more. Where's Joe?"

Her mind, weak and wandering, clung tenaciously to the one idea.

"Never you mind Joe," Mrs. Symes answered, chafing the girl's cold hands. "He'll be right enough presently, I daresay. You are going into a nice warm bed, and then to sleep. To-morrow we'll talk."

But the girl stopped her.

"I must find Joe to-night," she cried. "To-morrow will be too late. He said—the guv'nor said—Joe was going away to-morrow—thieving. Let me go, please let me go to him to-night."

She tried to raise her head, and a bright hectic flush came into her cheeks. Mrs. Symes was going to soothe her again, when John, kneeling down, took the girl's hand in his.

"Look at me," he said. "Do you remember who I am?"

The girl nodded.

"You settled that Tim Venner."

"Yes. Now listen. Joe, your Joe, is a friend of mine. Do you believe that?"

She nodded again.

"I'd believe anything you say."

"And if I say I will see Joe to-night," John went on, speaking very slowly and distinctly, "and bring him to see you to-morrow as soon as you're awake, will you believe that?"

"Yes," she whispered eagerly.

"Then will you do something for me in return?"

"If you gets me my Joe, anything in the world."

"Then obey your friend, Mrs. Symes, and do what the doctor orders. Is that agreed? If you promise, I will go to Joe."

The poor wan face, pinched and quivering now with pain and weakness, lit up with a wonderful smile.

"I'll promise that—aye, and more too. God bless you, sir."

John rose hurriedly and turned to Tom.

"I think she'll be easy to manage now. Will you take her up and fetch the doctor?—my job will take me all my time."

The prize-fighter stared.

"You ain't really a-going. It's a murdering place."

"Hush," John said warningly, for the girl's eyes were following them, and she was listening.

"I am going if I may leave the rest to you——"

"You may that," the big man cried, with an emphasis that was quite convincing. "If she were our own, she would not get more care—now."

"Thank you," John said quietly. "Mrs. Symes"—he took something from his pocket as the woman rose and came to him and placed it in her hand—"you are willing to take the responsibility?"

The woman's hard eyes softened.

"You heard me tell her we was friends. When I says that, master, I means it. In ten minutes she'll be tucked up in our own bed. Is that good enough?"

"I am very grateful," he said, and then, raising his hat, went quietly out into the night.

Mrs. Symes looked after him stupidly.

"Well, I never did!" she exclaimed.

He had left something between her fingers which crackled with an insinuating sound. She put it under the lamp and displayed it to her husband.

It was a ten-pound note.

CHAPTER XIII

TAKEN BY ASSAULT

CLERKENWELL CLOSE, where Nyne's lodging-house stood, was a strange, uncanny place.

A turning off Clerkenwell Green, it has now lost some of its ancient weirdness through the pulling down of tenement houses, building up places of business, and the removal of the old Clerkenwell Prison.

In the days when John Glynn was interested in it there was not a more dangerous, sinister spot in London. A dark, winding street with crooked turnings, breaking off into *culs-de-sac*. Let a stranger once get well into it he might find many things to prevent him from ever getting out again, even in broad daylight. At night it was a place to be avoided, especially by the police, unless in strong force.

The lodging-house in which John was interested was at the further end of the Close and easily to be found, for it was the only dwelling in the street with a light.

John arrived there at midnight. He went at a very leisurely pace through Clerkenwell Close, taking careful note of the turnings, so that in the event of a hasty retreat he might not miss the way. He had another reason for deliberation. How was he to get at Joe? The boy would be in a heavy sleep, and though John knew he bore tidings which would wake him quickly enough, it was hard to devise any possible way of telling him about Amy in a doss-house where men are packed like herrings and where every other man might be a friend of Percival Nyne's. In short, John could think of no way at all. In the meantime he had reached his destination, and now stood opposite the lodging-house itself.

There was a shop with loaves of bread and other eatables

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displayed in the window, but shut up and empty, and a long dark passage over the entrance of which was a flaring jet of gas.

John peered up the passage. It was about three feet wide, and extended for some twenty yards. At the further end was another door with a light over it and a short flight of steps, and in front a small square yard, in which John detected figures moving about. John paused to consider his chances. In order to get into the lodging-house, it would be necessary to place himself in the power of the authorities there. Were he once in the yard, three or four men could bar any possible escape, while their friends could work their will upon him in any way their taste and fancy suggested on the stones of the yard.

It seemed a wild-goose business enough. He knew the risks, and the prospect of being kicked to death or insensibility to no purpose was not attractive. If it had been a part of the contract he had made with himself to help Dick he would not have given the danger a thought. But it had nothing to do with that. It was the result of nothing more than sentimental pity for that little sick girl. John leant against the wall intending to reason the matter out further. But he did not reason at all. The scene on the steps of 49 Crisp Street, and the happy smile on Amy's face in the Symeses' house when he promised to bring Joe to her, came into his mind and settled the question. He had made a promise. There could be no question of expediency or weighing of chances and possibilities after that. He gave himself a mental shake for wasting time, and buttoning up his coat faced the situation and entered the narrow passage.

At the sound of his step, which he did not trouble to soften, and the sight of his tall hat, the men in the yard became very much on the alert.

Only one explanation occurred to them. He must be a detective in plain clothes after a fellow-lodger. John's broad shoulders and height favoured this idea. The only objection to it was that these men, who knew the police well

—individually and collectively—could not imagine any 'tec of their acquaintance being so suicidally foolish as to thrust his head alone into their den at midnight.

They met him courteously enough, and when he addressed them with a strong American accent, their curiosity even delayed for the moment the execution of their unanimous determination to teach the intruder a lesson he would neither forget nor recover from.

"Deputy around, gentlemen," John drawled, taking up a position in an angle of the wall where he would be protected in case of accident on two sides.

"He's in bed," was the prompt answer given by an elderly man with mild blue eyes and a hawk-like, handsome face—the worst scoundrel of them all, and the most dangerous. "You can't see him before six, guv'nor."

"Is that so?" John drawled easily. "Well, I can wait."

There was a soft shuffle of feet at his left. The handsome man had given a wink, and three slouching figures now filled up the opening to the passage. Retreat was cut off.

John folded his arms and leant against the wall.

"I am a stranger to this country," he said, yawning. "Only landed at Liverpool three days back, so I don't know much, but I reckoned your deputy would see a man from Mr. Percival Nyne."

At this name a sudden change came over the men. The one who had addressed him, and who, as John was perfectly aware from old experience, while apparently lounging in the yard, was in reality marshalling a gang of men for a rush, pulled his hands out of his pockets and gave a low whistle. Then he smiled incredulously.

"Nyne?" he said. "That's a blind, mister."

At this remark John thoughtfully turned up his coat cuffs, and taking out two large and curiously made steel rings, slipped one on to each hand over the second finger. These rings, of American manufacture, were knuckle dusters, the best of their kind. A blow from one, with John's weight behind it, would crush and splinter to the bone.

The man who had asked the question stepped hastily back out of range.

"If you really come from Nyne," he said politely, "that's different."

"I saw the guv'nor this morning in Crisp Street," John said, "and this evening outside 'The Grapes' in the Nile. I guess I will see that deputy now."

The man turned his head.

"Bill," he said sharply to a little creature—every inch a pickpocket—who was watching the fun in safety from the steps, "bring Malony."

The little man went nimbly on his errand, while John, to test his position, walked with leisurely step up to the end of the passage, now filled with men. They retreated with expedition at his approach and left the passage clear.

So far so good. To retain what he had gained, John stood in the opening while waiting for the deputy to appear. He could evidently, by skilful use of Nyne's name, get access to Joe; but the greatest problem of all, how to get the boy alone and how to get him out was as hard to solve as ever. Already the whole place was humming like a disturbed hive. He would be kept under strict surveillance, and if the deputy became suspicious and sent for Nyne, his position would be peculiar.

One minute passed, five minutes, no one came. John began to get exceedingly impatient, though outwardly he stood like a rock. The delay evidently surprised the men about him. They moved restlessly about and murmured among themselves.

All at once a door inside was smartly banged, and there was the sound of running feet. Another door opened, and down the steps rushed a spare, long-bodied individual with coarse carroty hair, cadaverous face, and one eye. He was as shabbily dressed as the others, but was obviously of very different standing. He wore an ancient frock coat with a velvet collar, and an old-fashioned stock secured with a gold pin, which gave him a quaint, old-world appearance.

"Mr. Malony," said the man who had sent for him, "here's a bloke from the guv'nor. Hello——"

He rounded his sentence with an astonished oath. The man he addressed was choking and wheezing as if half-strangled, his one eye rolling in his head, his hand at his throat, which was dripping with blood.

"Bhoys," he ejaculated in a hoarse whistling tone, "get the coal hammer and the axe and the poker, an' be ready to use 'em, else ye'll all be murdered. Bob Croucher is stark mad with D. T. He's broke the lock av the cellar door and is loose. He'd 've throttled the life out of me entoirely, but Bill came in at the nick av it, and he picked him up instead. Hark! he's a-comin' now."

A tremendous thumping smash was heard inside—the sound of cracking, yielding wood, and in the doorway appeared a man so tall that he had to stoop to get through it. He was holding in one hand the unfortunate pickpocket who had taken the message to the deputy, shaking him like a rat as he came down the steps. Now he dropped him and stood a moment glaring into the yard.

A gaunt, blear-eyed giant, diseased, reduced to skin and bone by debauchery and drink, but in his present condition formidable indeed. His clothing was a pair of breeches which obviously belonged to some one else, and a tattered shirt open at the throat. He was barefooted and bare-armed, and grimed with dirt. In sober moments he was the drudge of the establishment, employed by Nyne because he could do more work than three ordinary men, was honest, and needed little wages. It was seldom he scraped together the money for much drink, and when he did, he was shut up in the cellar to get over it. This was the first time he had broken loose.

If the deputy expected protection from his lodgers in this emergency he was woefully mistaken. The sight of this creature on the steps, his long fingers crooked like talons, his teeth chattering, and his eyes gleaming like those of a wild beast, knocked all nerve out of the bravest. Away they ran, some down the passage, the rest scattering right

and left like scared sheep. Malony was left cursing alone. At this instant, with a demoniacal howl, the creature leaped down the steps straight at him, upon which the terrified deputy tried to run, caught his foot in a crack in the pavement, and fell headlong.

The position was desperate, and had the madman reached the deputy, he would have killed him, but John met the man's rush half-way and closed with him. He was shorter by four inches than the maniac, but his brain was cool, and every muscle was braced for the shock. His arms closed round the other's waist low down, and he lifted him off his feet. The madman grasped him round the shoulders in his long arms and tried to bury his teeth in his neck, but he had not time. A twist, a turn, a heave of John's body from the hip upwards and the feet of the madman described a circle in the air and he was thrown over John's shoulder, falling on the stones below on his back with a crash that bruised every bone in his body.

As he fell John turned ready to finish him with a blow from the knuckle-dusters. But this was unnecessary. The shock of the fall sobered the man so far that, after lying a moment dazed and half stunned, he sat up and began to moan and rub himself like a hurt child, all the violence knocked out of him.

By this time the deputy was on his feet, and, forgetting his sore throat in relief at his escape, he clapped a grateful hand on John's shoulder.

"Bedad, my bhoy, that was well done. Honour bright, now, I could not have done it better myself. But hey, who are ye, then? A stranger. Begorra, a gentleman too. What?"

Mr. Malony had only one eye, but that was a very penetrating one. He reckoned John up in a twinkling, and offered a respectful hand.

"I thank ye, sorr," he said, in full view of the men now crowding up. "Whoever ye are, and whatever ye want, you are the friend for life and after of Patrick Malony."

John replied to the good Irish greeting with equal cordiality.

"I have come here," he said, "for a dozen words with you. I am glad I came."

"Indade, then I am," the deputy rejoined, rubbing his sore neck; "and ye shall have all ye want, sure. But first, let's put this mad divil to rights. Bhoys, haul him up."

The creature was now sobbing and calling himself endearing names. At the deputy's order he was taken hold of by two of the men and conducted to a room with a bed in it and securely locked in. This over, the deputy, paying no attention at all to some whispered remarks of the handsome man, and brushing roughly aside the rest of the lodgers, drew John into a comfortable parlour, locked the door, and produced a bottle of whiskey and two tumblers.

"Now, me friend, set yourself down and when ye're ready, but not before, tell me your business. Bedad, I'm faint with the pother, and need a pick-me-up myself. Me brain is all a-turnin' round an' round like a tee-tum top. Here's luck to ye!"

Suiting the action to the word, he poured out a liberal allowance of spirit into a glass and handed it to John, and then drank at a gulp half a tumblerful himself, and smacking his lips sat down in an armchair and comfortably crossed his feet.

John sipped at his tumbler also, and considered.

He had known many Irishmen—good, bad, and indifferent—generally indifferent—out West, but he had never known one who was not to be trusted when he felt himself under a real obligation.

"I will not keep you long," he said, observing the keen face with its prominent nose, square cheek-bones, and twinkling eye. "You know a man called Nyne, Percival Nyne."

"Do I?" said the deputy shortly. "Don't I? Are you a friend of the guv'nor's, then?"

He had come to the point. John weighed the chances.

"No. I am here to spoil a game of his if I can. I tell

you because I shall need your help. Will you give it in return for what I did for you?"

The deputy rose from his chair with a jerk, poured out more whiskey into his glass, and held it out to touch John's.

"I will," he said; "though Satan's own father, bad luck to 'im, weren't half such a divil as Percival Nyne, and he knows *that* about me as would put me away five year. But you've saved me life, and, what's more, give me your confidence. Sure, that settles the business. Now, what is it at all?"

Solemnly and in silence they chinked glasses twice and drank healths. Then John told the story of Joe and Amy, suppressing any allusion to Giles or Tom Symes.

Malony listened in attentive silence until the end. Then he slapped his thigh.

"My sakes, ye play a bould game, knowing what ye do, for I see you're not playing in the dark. But there's more to it, bedad, than you think for. I'll tell ye."

He went to the door and looked out, came back and locked it.

"Nyne has put this bhoy particular under me eye. The old bird—this I know from others—has worked for years to establish a combine of cracksmen. He's a receiver already, though too clever for the police to catch 'im; but he'd be the head av a trust of the guns, you understand, as would fair give him command of the Nile. But this ain't all pie just for the guv'nor. The biggest of the 'guns' don't like it, only they keep quiet because they owe him money, and he knows enough about all to give 'em time. But he has to get new blood for himself. Joe Cramp is just that. He knows locks, inside and out. He's a plucked 'un, and faithful to his friends. The guv'nor's been getting at him for months. I know for a fact he's stopped every tradesman in Relton from taking him on by telling them he's a wrong un', which was Satan's own lie. Now, at last, he's made him rob and then tucked him in here. On Monday night Joe will crack his first crib and be done for life."

"He won't," John said softly.

He leant forward and looked at the deputy, smiling. Malony drummed the table thoughtfully.

"Ye will have to tear him away," he said, "by force or a deal of guile. If ye miss fire ye'll never be safe in the Nile any more, and if you win, Nyne is your enemy for life. Be jabers, ye have taken up a hard nut this time. Your teeth must be sharp as razors to get through the husk. Your jaw must be iron to hold. But if you should do it—and I'm not the man to say no to that—Percival Nyne and the rest will get a set-back that'll quiet the Nile for a year. It'll be a different place, for every one in it will know, and all who know will tell, and since the guv'nor has been here he has never been beat yet."

John nodded.

"Very well," he said cheerfully. "Then it will be either he or me. Put the odds where you please."

"Odds!" cried the Irishman. "Bedad, there's none. Nyne is master here, and has the cunning of hell; but you have nerve and strength, and more power behind your shoulder than ye've towld me yet. And you carry cold steel in your eye. Sure there's no odds in it at all. But I'm for yez, and here's luck to us all! Now to business. We've no time to lose and no breath to waste. I'll get ye that bhoy. But be careful, be wary, me friend. You are a bull-dog with a lion's spring in ye; but Nyne's a snake, swift, silent, poisonous. He'll be here to-morrow and sniff danger in a twinkle. I'll foul the trail a bit, trust me, but once on a scent he'll never rest till he's wormed it out. Yet no one will know how much he knows, no one but me. You will save the boy, I'm thinking, though I don't know how. But, mind, if you do, Nyne will settle down at your heels and follow ye every step, wait for you, lay for you weeks, months, years until the chance comes to him, and then his fangs will go into the root of ye. There is only one thing to stop such as Percival Nyne——"

He had put away the whiskey and tumblers into a cupboard and locked it, and now moved toward the door shaking his head.

"What is that thing?" John asked, watching him under his eyelids; "I would like to know for curiosity."

The deputy opened the door, looked out, closed it again, and, holding the handle, turned back with a low, bitter oath. "His death," he said. "Until the life's crushed out of his skull-face, until there's not a wriggle left in him, neither your life nor mine, nor any one who's once crossed that man, is worth a button, me friend. It's that which makes him King of the Nile."

He went out now, and John was left to his thoughts. A few minutes later he heard heavy steps in the passage, heavier than the deputy's. The door opened and shut and a man stood staring stupidly about him.

John stepped forward under the lamp.

"We met at Critchett Place," he said. "I come as a friend."

Joe Cramp, his hearing dull with heavy sleep, started, muttered something, and turned to go out.

John caught him by the shoulder, swung him against the wall, and stepped between him and the door.

"I come from Amy Bent."

Joe stiffened all over at the name, and his jaw dropped in utter surprise.

"Amy—you——" he murmured.

"She has sent a message by me," John said. "Sit down and listen to it. When I have told you what she said, do what you please."

Joe stared into the face now close to his for some moments, then, yielding to the look in John's eyes, he stumbled to the table and sank into a chair there.

"Tell me," he said. "I'll listen now."

CHAPTER XIV

A CASE FOR PROSECUTION

WHEN Evelyn Grey arrived at Dr. Stansfield's house for a certificate about Amy, she was informed by the servant that he had only just come in after being up all night, and was unable to see her. He would attend the meeting of Committee and give his opinion of the girl's condition then.

Evelyn went away in a thoughtful mood. Something had happened to Amy. She probably knew by this time of Joe's delinquencies, poor girl. Evelyn looked at her watch. It was after ten, and she ought to be at the office at half-past. If she called at 49 Crisp Street, she would be at least half-an-hour late, and it was committee day. She put her watch away, frowned, shook her head at herself, and then, with her chin in the air, turned in the direction of Crisp Street and walked hard.

She knocked the three knocks at the door. No one came. She knocked again. Some one—the dirtiest woman she had ever seen—came up from the basement, opened the door two inches, and said Mrs. Prickett was out.

Evelyn, intimating that she had come to see Amy Bent, gently but firmly laid her shoulder against the door. The woman opened it wider.

"She's gone away," she said.

Evelyn frowned incredulously. "Where?"

"'Ow should I know? I've been in my bed and asleep all night. You won't be no wiser going up," as Evelyn made a movement to push past. "Mrs. Prickett went to her work as usual, and the door's locked."

This was evidently the truth. Evelyn dissembled her impatience and smiled sweetly into the dirty face.

"Thank you for telling me. You knew Amy, and perhaps heard that there has been some trouble. What do you think has happened?"

This had the desired effect. The woman came out on the steps, and holding the door closed behind her, said confidentially:

"Between you and me and that 'ere lamp-post, a lot has happened. I weren't very grand last night, and was looking out of my window, and about twelve o'clock I saw—what d'ye think?" She lowered her voice to a whisper. "I saw Amy come back here—she was all dressed, same as you, so she'd been out before—she was with a young feller. He was drunk, I think; anyhow, he took hold of her too free, and she screeched a bit, and another man came up—a big gent, with a tall 'at—and takes the other up like a rat, as you may say, and kicks him into the street; and then Amy, she faints off stiff, and after a minute the gent takes her in his arms, easy as I'd take a kitten, and away he walks down street with her, and never comes back. Poor girl," she gave a significant sigh, "where she is, or what she's a-doing of, Lord knows. But I'm thinking Joe Cramp, whom she kep' company with, will never see her any more."

"Where was Mrs. Prickett?" Evelyn said sharply.

The woman grinned, and bent forward till her face nearly touched Evelyn's.

"Upstairs, drunk. A-snoring so as you could hear her through two floors—that's auntie!"

She sniggered joyously, and was about to enter upon unsavoury reminiscences of Mrs. Prickett, who was not a friend of hers, when Evelyn abruptly wished her a good day and departed forthwith.

Something had happened, indeed, but speculation was worse than useless. The explanation would await her at the office. The big man in the "tall 'at" must be Mr. Glynn; but what could he be doing here at midnight? How could Amy have got out? Was this other man Joe, or was it Percival Nyne?

Such thoughts and all kinds of other possibilities ran riot

in Evelyn's brain as she hurried to Critchett Place. By the time she arrived there she was quite feverish.

At the office she found old Giles, busy with his usual work, but no Mr. Glynn. A letter, however, was on her table, brought, Giles said, by a special messenger from the Hotel Metropole. Evelyn examined the writing with curiosity. It was characteristic writing. Rather upright, the letters the same size, all the lines firmly drawn, regular, legible, and strong.

The note itself was merely to say that urgent business prevented the writer from coming to the office before the afternoon, but that he would be sure to be at Committee, and hoped to bring good news both of Joe and of Amy Bent.

This sentence made the whole matter more mysterious than ever. Then an idea struck Evelyn, and she took the letter to old Giles.

"You and Mr. Glynn, Giles," she said severely, "and I believe Dr. Stansfield, are engaged in a conspiracy. Will you please tell me what this letter means?"

Giles shook his head.

"I can't, miss. I will tell you what I thinks." He sat back in his chair, and pushed up his spectacles with an air of virtuous innocence, which did not deceive Evelyn in the very least. "Mr. Glynn and me, Miss Grey," he said slowly, "had a little talk last night after you left. He said he was wonderful interested in the case of Amy Bent and this thief. He takes me up the City Road and gives me a bit of supper, and we chatted together quite a while about the business, and how to get hold of Joe, and whether there were any way of bamboozling that precious old rascal Nyne. I said there was not, but Mr. Glynn he would have it there might be; and—and then we discussed ways and means. As to that letter, if you ask my opinion, I think, seeing what a determined kind of gentleman Mr. Glynn is, that he must have found a way. At least that's how I read it; but, of course, I may be wrong."

Evelyn looked at the old man for several moments without speaking, then she raised her finger.

"And I think, Giles, that you have materially helped Mr. Glynn to find this way, whatever it is, and are as well aware as you can be that a mine is to be sprung this afternoon upon me and the Committee. That is how I read this letter, and I am quite sure I am not mistaken."

At this rejoinder, delivered in a judicial tone, with smiling eyes, Giles began to shake all over with internal laughter. At last, wiping his spectacles, he said faintly:

"I told Mr. Glynn how it would be. 'No use, sir,' I sez, 'a-trying to take in Miss Grey; she knows me far too well for that.' But there! He was set on keeping quiet until he had something to show you, and I had to humour him, for, serious, miss, this is his business, it is really, not mine. And it's he, not me, as will, I truly believe, now, catch that old rascal by the neck as well as save the lad and your little girl, an' all. Therefore, we must let him do it, if you will pardon me, in his own way."

Evelyn folded up the letter with a nod.

"By all means," she said quietly. "I have not the least wish to know more than Mr. Glynn wants me to know."

She went to her table, and plunged into her labours for the day, which were heavy and varied enough to absorb any one's energies.

But though she did her work conscientiously, and just completed it, with a hurried lunch between, half-an-hour before four—the hour the Committee met—her thoughts were constantly wandering to the mystery that was in the air, and to speculations as to the plan by which this surprising new worker of hers was going to compass the impossible, and persuade the Committee, which he had never seen, not to prosecute Joe Cramp, who had stolen their money, and who, though afterwards hinting at restitution, had slunk away with his confederate, the most influential man in the Nile.

Another thing troubled Evelyn, though she would not have admitted it. A certain phrase of Giles's, which she *fancied he had* laid stress upon for her particular benefit,

kept recurring to her mind like the burden of some irritating song.

"Seeing what a determined kind of gentleman he is." Now what did Giles mean by that? If he meant that because circumstances enabled Mr. Glynn to take a leading part in the developments of this case, and even perhaps by some means to influence the Committee's decision, while she was helpless, he was therefore going to become her adviser, philosopher, and guide in the conduct of the business of this office, he would be rudely awakened. At the mere thought of it Evelyn became hot all over. Mr. Brooke's letter surely did not mean that. At lunch time she whipped it out of her pocket and read it over again. No, it meant nothing of the kind. The whole idea was absurd, really. Mr. Glynn was a strong man—possibly a masterful one, though he had not shown that side yet—but he was entirely new to her business. Had she served a hard apprenticeship in many offices for a whole year, had she measured herself beside other secretaries—men-secretaries—and found herself able to control the situation by her superior power of will, to be put down now by a man who had not been a week in England? It was ridiculous. She said this to herself several times, with increasing emphasis every time. Nevertheless she thought about it a good deal, and with the vision of Mr. Glynn's face in her mind's eye when he struck Joe Cramp to the ground, she knew in her heart that whatever might or might not happen in the future, a personality possessed of a strength and vitality she had never seen in a man before had stepped into her official life, and would have to be seriously reckoned with.

It was with an indefinable foreboding that she made her last preparations for Committee, and met her chairman, General Gainsborough, who, according to invariable custom, arrived before his colleagues at ten minutes to four.

General Gainsborough was a little man of sixty-five, with short, bristly grey hair and black eyebrows. He walked with a slight limp, the result of an old wound in the Crimea. But he was brisk, alert, and upright, wearing no overcoat,

though the day was cold. He had a square, strong face, but his eyes, though a little stern when at rest, were full of kindness and good cheer, and only a man with a lie in his mouth need fear the General. But it was well known among his friends that such a man, were he poor or wealthy, in high places or low, had better, if he valued peace of mind and his skin, keep clear of General Gainsborough.

He bowed with old-fashioned courtesy as he shook hands with Evelyn.

"Got your letter, Miss Grey. A bad business, this robbery, but it can't be helped. I have—ahem—a word to say about it." He drew her on one side. "The loss is the Committee's—the Committee's, you understand."

Evelyn smiled.

"There is no loss, General. I paid in ten pounds this morning."

"Then you did very wrongly," he exclaimed, frowning, with twinkling eyes. "You give me a great trouble of unnecessary trouble. I send you a cheque to-night."

"Please do not. It happened through my carelessness."

"My dear young lady, it was nothing of the kind. Say no more about it, or you will spoil my temper for Committee. As a matter of fact"—he coughed, and took a piece of paper out of a ticket pocket—"I feared you would do this, so I brought this with me in case of accidents." He placed a cheque for ten pounds in her hand, and marched hastily away.

"You are very kind to me," she said gratefully, seeing that resistance was useless.

"I am very angry with you," he retorted. "The idea of your paying in without consulting me first. There is a scandalous lack of discipline in this office. Ah! time's up."

It was four o'clock, and General Gainsborough seated himself, with Evelyn at his left hand.

Members of Committee were arriving now and Evelyn's spirits rose as she opened her books and looked round the group of faces, which now included the new clergyman's *and* Dr. Stansfield.

Three months ago there had only been half the number present at the weekly meeting, and no visitors. The place and the work under her hand were alive and growing.

The minutes were read and the weekly balance-sheet describing the state of the Committee's finances submitted. Notices of meetings convened by the council of the Society at Villiers Place were given out, and then the chairman called on the secretary to inform the Committee of the disaster in the office the day before. He had wanted to do it himself, but Evelyn would not have that. She gave the facts in brief, official tone, and was devoutly thankful that Mr. Glynn had not yet arrived, so that she was able to tell it in her own way and without comments.

The Committee were deeply moved. Following the example of the chairman before the meeting, they dismissed at once her attempt to take responsibility, expressed keen sympathy and much curiosity to see Mr. John Glynn, and a unanimous desire to punish the criminal, if he could be found, with the utmost rigour of the law.

Evelyn, though she acknowledged the kindness to herself, was depressed. In the face of such an attitude arguments in favour of leniency for Joe would fall upon deaf ears. Everything now depended upon the news Mr. Glynn might bring. It was a comfort to reflect, after all, that he was undoubtedly "a determined kind of man."

She said nothing of her second meeting with the thief or of her afternoon experiences, but putting Amy Bent's case quietly on one side until Mr. Glynn's arrival, went on with the ordinary business of the day.

This was of the usual kind—a widow left with three little children asking for help to put them into an orphanage. Evelyn reported her to be a bright, energetic person, who readily accepted a suggestion that she might learn ironing and laundry-work and keep her family herself. A married sister had been discovered who would keep one child. What was needed was the sum of nine pounds, to keep her and two little ones for three months while she was being trained, and pay a small premium to a firm for taking her. The Com-

mittee then considered how the expense was to be met, and at a suggestion from the secretary that an employer of the widow's late husband was said to be interested in her case, it was decided that the money should be guaranteed. Then came the case of a person who had written a begging-letter to a well-known city firm, stating that she was an officer's widow, starving for want of bread. The firm, touched at the pitiful tale, had sent five pounds before asking for inquiry, and now forwarded the letter in the hope that the Society would be as liberal as themselves. Alas for the firm! The address given in the letter was a tobacconist's shop, and the writer a man with half-a-dozen aliases, unfavourably known to the police.

There were men who had been ill needing treatment at convalescent homes: there were small tradesmen asking for back rent to be paid up, desiring capital to re-establish businesses ruined by drink and folly: there were crippled children requiring surgical instruments, and widows anxious to set up business with mangles and sewing-machines and lodging-houses.

Some were very easy to decide, others most difficult, the question usually being whether the help required would really raise the position of the family and do any lasting good. In every instance some effort and initiative were required from the persons themselves, however poor they might be, to meet what had to be done for them, at which insistence Dr. Stansfield—who was a Socialist, and believed that self-help and thrift were an invention of the idle rich to save themselves responsibility—wriggled in his chair and kept still with difficulty. The Rev. Stephen Merwell, on the contrary, grew more and more interested, and twice took part in the discussion, to Evelyn's great delight, especially as on each occasion he supported the view of the case which she had recommended to the Committee. It was now five o'clock, and the cases were nearly done. In a few minutes Amy Bent's must come in for decision, whether Mr. Glynn were here or not. Evelyn began to get nervous and irritable. *She wondered whether*, yielding to some bashful instinct of

a backwoodsman, he was shirking the ordeal of a committee altogether. Yet he had promised to bring news.

The last case was now on hand—a short and easy one to decide—when she heard at last what she had been listening half-an-hour for—a sharp ring at the door bell. Giles answered it; there were whisperings in the passage, the tread of heavy feet stepping softly, and then Mr. Glynn came in to the committee room.

Evelyn flashed a questioning glance at him, in answer to which he gave a reassuring nod and smile. Then he slipped into a chair near the door. But he was not allowed to remain in the background.

General Gainsborough, who had been expecting him, stopped business.

"It is not often," he said, holding out his hand so that John had to rise and come forward, "that an officer makes a reputation in the regiment before he appears at mess. But you have done it, Mr. Glynn. On behalf of the Committee, I have pleasure not only in welcoming you as a fellow-worker, but in thanking you for the manner in which you dealt with that rascal who assaulted and robbed Miss Grey."

The General's words were greeted with applause, and Evelyn felt pitiful for her backwoodsman. She need not have troubled herself. He received the compliment with a self-possessed bow, and responded with all imaginable coolness.

"You honour me too much, sir, the other man too little. A good deal has happened since, as Miss Grey can tell you."

This turned attention upon Evelyn, who confirmed the last statement, and took up the papers of Amy Bent.

The Committee heard her narrative of the case to the end without a word. But never in the history of the Society for the Improvement of the Condition of the Poor was there such repressed excitement over a case. Even the chairman, staid old soldier as he was, and foreseeing also, as the secretary proceeded, that a grave and difficult issue would have to be decided, grew more and more excited; and when

Evelyn concluded with a vivid description of Percival Nyne, and the malign power of the man over Joe Cramp, the General could contain himself no longer.

"A modern Fagin, and worse—abominable old scoundrel!" he exclaimed. "Monstrous! The full particulars must be placed in the hands of the police at once, and I will write to my brother-in-law, the Chief Commissioner. The scoundrel shall be sent into penal servitude."

The Committee supported their chairman with vigour, and Evelyn, taking advantage of their enthusiasm, asked for instructions concerning the fate of Joe Cramp.

The chairman answered her.

"We must prosecute, of course," he said, "but as the fellow has behaved well since we need not press the case, and if he pleads guilty the magistrate will deal with him. That will only mean six or twelve months' hard labour. But that is the least he should get."

A pause followed the General's dictum. Evelyn, knowing her chairman's authority with the Committee, felt little hope. When he spoke in such a tone no one ever ventured to dispute him. Nevertheless she struck in with all the force she had.

"I would ask the Committee to remember," she said, in the quietest tone she could muster, "that prosecution will have very serious consequences. The girl Amy Bent is so devoted to Joe that if he goes to prison she will be broken-hearted, and she is very ill. Then—if I may say so, being the person who was assaulted—the protection and courtesy Joe, this man, gave me when I was quite at his mercy, surely atones a good deal for anything he did in the morning. I know, of course," she added hurriedly, seeing an impatient frown gathering upon the General's face, "that he stole money, and for that he should be punished. But he has been. If the Committee could see the terrible bruises on his face, the agony of mind he was in before Amy, and the earnestness of his words of repentance and promise of restitution, I cannot help thinking even perhaps the chair*man* would consider that, should he give proper guarantees

of reform and pay over at once the five pounds he had for his share, a prosecution might be avoided."

This was a long speech for Evelyn, and it was the first time that she had ever contradicted General Gainsborough. The moment it was over she felt extremely uncomfortable. A look of disapproval and deep offence was upon the General's face. She feared she had jeopardised a friendship which was very precious to her.

"The Committee have now the issue before them from two points of view," he said in a very dry, scrupulously polite tone. "The secretary, I understand, advocates no action. She would have this thief—I beg his pardon—her protector—go scot free because he is the fortunate lover of an attractive damsel in a bad state of health; and because in exchanging blows with Mr. Glynn he happened to be worsted, poor fellow; and because, being suddenly confronted with Miss Grey in the presence of his virtuous fiancée, he proffered such terms as occurred to him to stay proceedings; and, lastly, because he exercised the wits that were in him and made himself Miss Grey's champion on her way home. The Committee will now decide. I confess to some disappointment that our secretary should have allowed feeling and sentiment to warp that excellent judgment of hers, upon which the Committee was learning to rely."

This was rather terrible, and Evelyn's face crimsoned under the rebuke. The members of the Committee did not know which way to turn. The ladies who were present, and two clergymen, were in sympathy with Evelyn; but the ladies were merely visitors, and the clergy, if the truth must be told, only attended to induce the Committee to be generous when the cases of their own parishioners were at issue. Mr. Merwell also, though feeling strongly, was conscious that he was only a visitor. The other members of Committee—two fellow officers of the General, a business man from the City, who was hon. treasurer, and the Rural Dean of Relton—were against Evelyn, though at the same time some of them thought the chairman rather severe.

Evelyn saw that were votes taken she would be hope-

lessly beaten. The only hope of the situation lay in Mr. Glynn, but Mr. Glynn was silent. He was attentively watching every face, but he did not speak. An impulse of intense aggravation with the man beset Evelyn. Here in her moment of direst need he said nothing, did nothing. So much for the "smiting" power of this "right arm." For once even Mr. Brooke had been mistaken. Her thoughts were cut short by an outburst from another quarter.

Little Dr. Stansfield, his face an angry red, and his voice controlled with difficulty, and not quite successfully, to the compass of a small committee room, rose to answer the chairman.

"I have no right to speak here, sir," he panted, "but I am an old Relton man and a doctor, and with your permission——"

General Gainsborough smiled genially.

"You know this man, I believe?"

"I have known Joe Cramp and this girl of his for a year. I was with her at one this morning; I left her at seven. She lies between life and death, all through this business, and if you send the man to prison she dies. I have no more to say, sir. I daren't say any more, or I shall be rude. But I will add—though meaning no disrespect to any one, I must add—that if you prosecute Joe Cramp you will be guilty of murder, the deliberate, premeditated murder of an innocent girl."

The words were spoken in a breath, and culminated in a blow on the table which made the ink pots dance.

General Gainsborough's face stiffened, and Evelyn saw the last glimmer of her hope disappear.

"I must call you to order, sir," he said; "the case of the girl, Amy Bent, is not before us. It must be taken quite separately. If she is the honest, well-principled person I trust she may be, she will refuse to continue her engagement to this rascal. In that case we shall assist her adequately. If she maintains her connection with him after his crime, all responsibility on our part regarding her is at an *end.* I am sure the Committee will agree with me there."

There was a murmur of assent, at which Dr. Stansfield lost all self-control.

"Then I bid the Committee good-day," he cried, seizing his hat and marching to the door. "Amy Bent will never give up the man she loves—she cannot. Shall I tell you why?"—he glared round—"I will. In six months, if she lives, she will be the mother of his child."

CHAPTER XV

VOLTE-FACE

THE effect of Dr. Stansfield's concluding words was what might be expected.

General Gainsborough, with a significant gesture, remarked quietly:

"I think this matter has been sufficiently discussed. I move from the chair that the secretary be instructed to take the proper steps for the apprehension of the man, Joe Cramp; and that the application of Amy Bent for assistance be dismissed."

"I second that," said a member of the Committee, one Major Hamer, a quiet old gentleman, famous for his generous personal gifts to distressing cases.

But before the motion could be put, John interposed.

"May I ask a question, sir?"

The chairman coughed irritably.

"If you must," he said. "But pray be brief."

John thanked him.

"I want to know," he said, "whether you will be kind enough to see this man before you decide to prosecute. He is waiting in the other room."

At this announcement the General laid down a pen he had dipped into the ink to record his decision, and sat back in his chair.

"Do you mean to say that this fellow is on the premises?"

"I brought him here," John answered, "from a lodging-house in Clerkenwell."

The General looked helplessly round the room.

"Upon my word," he exclaimed, half laughing, "I never heard of such a thing in my life!"

John's face did not move a muscle.

"I have taken a liberty for which I beg pardon. But the boy felt that he should face it through, and I thought the idea sensible. He can be taken into custody at once if you wish. May he come in to speak for himself?"

The General grunted.

"H'm! I suppose so. Yes, let us see him."

John opened one of the folding doors and beckoned, and into the committee room stalked Joe.

Evelyn gave a start of surprise. She hardly knew the man. He was very respectably and neatly dressed, and his face, haggard with suffering and some strong emotion, looked curiously softened and refined.

A thrill of compassion went through the Committee. The bruises the secretary had mentioned were there in full evidence; the lips were swelled and discoloured; there was a large lump on his forehead, and the bandage round his head, the edge of which was smeared with blood, made the ladies shiver.

As for Joe himself, it was the most awful moment of his life. He heard some one ask him a question sharply. He was conscious that his fate depended upon a prompt reply, but he was so breathless with nervousness that he could not speak a word. A hand was laid upon his shoulder.

"Answer the chairman," John said. "Tell him what you feel about it all; speak up, and speak out. I have told him that you will."

Joe recovered his nerve.

"There ain't much, sir," he said, looking straight into General Gainsborough's face. "I came here yesterday to thieve. I was set on, but that ain't what I want to say. I took ten pounds. I deserve the jug for it, and I've come—I come to tell ye so. That's all, sir."

At this confession the General frowned so heavily that his brows almost met over his nose; but more than one member of the Committee noticed that his lips twitched.

"Why did you do it?"

The question rather took Joe aback.

"Eh—sir?" he faltered.

"Why did you do it, I say," snapped the old gentleman sharply. "Tell the Committee. You had some reason, I suppose?"

"It was my little girl. I wanted money for her, as I told the lady yesterday," nodding at Evelyn. "But there's no odds in that to you since it was thieving."

"Quite right," the General said severely. "But I wanted the Committee to know. Have you anything else to say?"

Joe's face grew red and nervous again.

"Ye—es, I has," he muttered feebly.

"Say it, then. The Committee will hear it."

Joe buried a hand in one of his pockets. Out of this pocket he pulled five sovereigns and laid them on the table.

"That's from Amy," he said, and he paused, made an awful face to get his breath again, and then went through.

"I want to know, sir, if the Committee 'll look after her when I've gone in. She's no friends but the lady," with another nod at Evelyn, "and she needs a lot. Punish me—to rights; I'll stand it. But don't, I ask ye, don't blame it on to her."

He spoke clearly and well until the last, and then his voice failed him and fell to a husky whisper.

There was a moment of silence, then General Gainsborough coughed. No doubt it was the damp weather and because he had done much speaking that afternoon, but he coughed so hard that he had to take out his handkerchief and blow his nose before he could reply.

"The Committee will consider your request," he said. "Leave the room now, and wait outside."

Joe withdrew with great expedition, and John closed the folding doors behind him.

"Mr. Glynn," the chairman said, wiping his eyes as a man does sometimes when attacked by sudden catarrh, "tell the Committee what you know of this fellow."

"I know him pretty well," John answered. "He means all he says and what he says. He is not a thief bred. He was pulled into this by temptation by others worse than himself. It is the first offence, and will be the last. He has

promised the girl that, and he will keep his word. He loves her honestly. They would have been married six months ago if he had not fallen out of work."

"That may be so," the General said testily. "But what proof is there that he will keep his word? He has returned half the money; but I am thinking of the future. I should like some guarantee of his reformation, and there is none obtainable that I can see."

"Not much of a one, I admit," John said in a humble tone. "You have mine, but I can only give that for what it is worth."

The General's lips twitched again; but the severity of his frown abated not a whit.

"I see. Then pardon me if I am personal. What evidence—I must put it crudely—can you give of any plan to reform this—this friend of yours?"

"That depends on the Committee, sir."

"Ah, they must not prosecute; that is your meaning."

"If they do not," John said, "Amy Bent will go into the country to get strong, and marry Joe as soon as he has made a home for her. Until they marry, Joe will live with me."

The General pished incredulously.

"My good sir, do you mean to take this fellow, this thief —to call things by their right names—in your own house? It is preposterous."

John looked steadily round the table, and then into General Gainsborough's face.

"We differ, sir. I don't see why a man should object to a friend staying with him for a while."

The General looked hard at the speaker to see if he were in earnest, and then threw back his head and laughed aloud.

"Upon my word! Ladies and gentlemen, Hamer, what say you now? Shall we send Mr. Glynn's friend to gaol?"

Major Hamer, stiffly erect as a ramrod and without a sign of emotion, shook his head.

"I agree to the withdrawal of the motion, and will contribute five pounds to send the girl away," he said curtly.

At this speech from such a quarter, the Committee collapsed into laughter and cheers. The only protest came from the new Vicar of St. Margaret's, Crisp Street.

"With deference to the Major, Amy Bent's expenses have already been guaranteed," he said. "I became responsible for them yesterday."

The General rubbed his hands in high good humour.

"Bring that rascal in," he cried, "and let me tell him.

"Cramp," he said, as Joe returned, a little sullen now. He thought he had come to hear sentence. "The Committee, understanding that you never thieved before, and are to live honestly in future, will not prosecute. You are a free man. Now I want you to answer a question. What do you intend to do to earn a living?"

But Joe could not answer at once. The good news took such a weight off his heart that, but for Amy's illness, he could have laughed in the chairman's face. As it was, he breathed hard and fumbled with his cap and rubbed his forehead. Suddenly he looked at John and grinned.

"Why, sir," he said, "I goes to Mr. Glynn."

The General pursed his lips.

"He keeps you, then, for nothing."

Joe frowned.

"Not likely. When I finds work I'll pay him all I owes after I've got together the other five pounds owing to the Committee. That's what I mean, sir."

The General smiled approval.

"I believe you will do it."

Joe raised his head.

"I will do it, sir," he said. "There'll be a fight first with them in the Nile; but I ain't afeard. I were last night. But there don't live a man so chicken-hearted, I do hope, as would fear aught, even if it was a killing job, alongside of Mr. Glynn."

He spoke out boldly, and then, remembering where he was, suddenly collapsed.

"I'll bid you good-afternoon, sir," he mumbled, bundling *himself to* the door. "I thank ye and all here for the kind-

ness done. I'll never forget it, nor will my little girl, as long as ever we lives."

His hand was on the door now, and in another instant he would have been outside, but at this moment General Gainsborough sprang actively from the chair, and, electrifying all who knew him, extended his hand.

"Stand by Mr. Glynn as he has stood by you, and you may count us all as friends. God-speed you, lad."

CHAPTER XVI

THE SHADOW CAST BEFORE

GENERAL GAINSBOROUGH missed three trains and was late for his dinner that night; but he did not mind. With a select few of the Committee, including the new Vicar of St. Margaret's, he drew from John, though not without difficulty, the adventure of the night, so far as Joe and Amy were concerned. The formation of the league against Percival Nyne, the compromising position of Tom Symes, and even Giles's active assistance at No. 18, were carefully left out of the narrative. The Committee, therefore, while highly delighted with their new worker, and with themselves for having stayed their hands and granted Joe Cramp his freedom, remained wholly unaware and unsuspicious of the darker side of last night's doings and what was still to come.

John congratulated himself on this, for, truth to say, the social, discursive atmosphere of a committee, where a man must unfold his mind and talk about his work and plans for some one else to approve them before they can become operative, wearied him beyond measure. He had worked in silence and alone all his life. He intended to do so in future (Giles excepted) where important issues in Relton were concerned. But he reckoned without his host.

The members of the Committee departed their several ways. Giles, who went early on committee days, had gone two hours ago. It therefore fell out that Evelyn and John were left alone to close the office.

They put away the books, and Evelyn locked the safe. Then, instead of turning out the gas, she sat down in her office chair.

"Do you know, Mr. Glynn, you give me great anxiety."

The words were said in a grave, reproachful tone.

John, always unready of speech where Evelyn was concerned, could only ask bluntly, why?

"I had a talk with Giles this morning," Evelyn answered, amused at the curt question, "and I have listened attentively to all that you have been saying this evening. There is something in the air—something which has happened or is going to happen which you have not told us, and which Giles refused to tell me. Now, is that quite fair? I think I know what is in your mind," she went on quickly. "You say to yourself that this is a man's business; and when this or that has happened and all is over, then you will allow me to know, but not before. Well, I am only a woman, I know. But I am secretary here. So, again I ask, do you think it is quite fair to keep me in the dark?"

If John were startled at Miss Grey's opening remark, he was still more disturbed by her question and all that it implied.

"I did not think about it in that way," he said slowly. "That is," correcting himself, "I certainly did not mean to be unfair."

"But you are. Perhaps you think that as I am only a woman it is not wise to trust me with important secrets. If so, of course I can say nothing, whatever I may think. Please be quite frank. I must know—that is, I think I should know—exactly how we stand."

John played with a ruler on the desk. She had struck the nail on the head. He had not intended to confide his plans to a woman. He must now either lie with a brazen face or mortally offend her. It was hard. He had confidently hoped this business of Joe and Amy would knit them together to Dick's advantage, and now it was going to do the reverse and defeat the very object for which he had come to Relton. He sighed, and then Evelyn, who was observing him closely, saw his face stiffen with resolution.

"I did not intend to be unfair," he said again, "but I suppose I should have told you more if you had been a man." He paused, measuring his words. "You are right so far."

Evelyn rose with a flushed face.

"Thank you," she said quietly. "I think that is all there is to be said."

"Not quite, please."

He made a movement which brought him closer to her with an unconscious, masterful gesture, which Evelyn resented, but which gained its object, for she stood still.

"I shall not please you," he went on. "I have been out West since I was a lad, where there are no women. I have no more tact or manners than a grizzly. But I shall not trouble you long. As soon as I have straightened out things in the Nile, and the rest of it, I shall leave Relton. In the meantime, I will give you as little trouble as I can. I ask for your consideration."

He smiled, the humourous side of the situation striking him; but he meant what he said, and Evelyn felt it.

This, for some reason, annoyed her extremely.

"If you will excuse my saying so, that is quite absurd," she replied, taking up her hat and putting it on before a small mirror where he could not see her face. "You will succeed in reforming Joe, for he worships the ground you tread on, and then there will be no bounds to your influence with the Committee; or in the district. Your strength is, of course, immensely greater than mine, and as you gain experience will be of infinite value to the work. Please do not think I am so dense as not to recognise that, or to take offence at—at trifles. All I really wished when I said what I did, was, well, simply to know what you were going to do in my district. But I am now content to wait until the work is done. You have my best wishes for your success."

She turned toward him with a face so serene and a manner so dignified that John felt distinctly foolish. He had half thought of offering to unfold his plans, or part of them, but she looked so indifferent now that this seemed altogether out of place, and all that occurred to him was to say, as he opened the front door for her:

"If success comes, it will be largely due to Giles."

He closed the hall door behind her, and opened the gate *below.*

"Really, for a grizzly bear," Evelyn said to herself with a smile as she hurried off to the station, "he has quite pretty manners. But I am not sure that it is not an appropriate name in more ways than one."

Evelyn lived with her mother in a little brown house on the edge of Hampstead Heath.

"The Mount" was a tiny place with only one large sitting-room, three bedrooms, and a kitchen; but it was compact, and had no basement—an important consideration for people who can only afford to keep one servant; and, best of all, had a good garden back and front.

Lady Wendover, Mrs. Grey's sister, called it "an out-of-the-way, poky little hole"; but then, Lady Wendover lived in Park Lane. Moreover, her ladyship loved to be in the world, while Mrs. Grey, so long as she had her *Spectator* and her daily paper, a small, select circle of old friends, and her daughter to freshen the atmosphere with accounts of her doings and work, desired nothing so much as to be away from it.

A small, frail woman, with silvery hair under her widow's cap, though she was only in her fifty-sixth year. Her heart was not strong, the result of repeated rheumatic attacks, and in winter time she was much confined to the house.

Mrs. Grey had a thin, refined face, with deep-set grey eyes which were of gentlest expression, yet were capable of lighting up, if she heard of injustice or wrong, in a marvellous way, and one very disconcerting to those who did not share her opinions.

She knew nearly every one in Hampstead, young and old, gentle and simple, and was known by them. Mrs. Grey lived no hermit's life. Suffering or oppression of the weak was never given lightly in her sight, as the donkey men on the Heath, omnibus drivers on the road, careless or brutal mothers of babies in the courts and "buildings," and countless little boys of the street prone to bully and tease, knew to their cost. Yet it might be said of Mrs. Grey that, though she interfered often, she never interfered in vain—a fact due to her keen perceptions, a tact that was never at fault, an

untiring faith in the most unpromising human nature, and the gift of pungent, persuasive speech.

Such was Evelyn's mother.

This evening Mrs. Grey sat in her accustomed corner, at the left-hand side of the fire, playing "patience." It was a complicated kind of patience, requiring much skill as well as good fortune, to enable the player to win. When Evelyn came home later than usual, Mrs. Grey always played it to occupy her mind. To-night the vicissitudes of the game were remarkable. At first the cards came just as she wanted them, then fortune turned against her and all went ill.

At this juncture Mrs. Grey looked at the clock and found it was half-past seven. She put down her cards to poke the fire and feel Evelyn's slippers, which were warming in front of it. Her face wore an anxious expression.

"How late the child is," she said to herself. "That means the Committee have turned against her and the new worker has proved a broken reed. Why does the S. I. C. P. have such feeble men?"

It may be remarked that Mrs. Grey was not quite an impartial judge in these matters. Her late husband, Colonel Grey, had been a mutiny man and a comrade of Nicholson's. He had won his majority at the fall of Delhi.

A miniature of him hung on the wall at her side. It was the likeness of a man with a stern fighting face, who had seen hard service all his life. Mrs. Grey did not understand the men of the present day.

"They are pleasant enough, these young fellows," she went on to herself, taking up her cards again. "Gentlemanly, and clever too, but they have lost the *diable* and force of their fathers. Master Dick Brabant is an example. He fell in love with Evelyn like a man, and all seemed well, though I always suspected a weakness. Then he came to the point, and she refused him, just as I refused her father." The good lady laughed softly at the remembrance. "But what a difference! My dear one came again and again until he won me, while Mr. Brabant retired at once with a bow.

Well, well"—she gave a little nod—"so much the better for me and for the child. Now, this man—what was his name? —John Glynn—yes. I have not seen him, and probably never shall see him; but I am as certain he will turn out a disappointment as I am that I shall lose this game of 'patience.' "

Mrs. Grey gave her head a prophetic shake and played her last cards sadly. But a remarkable thing happened. These cards were just the ones she wanted. The suits filled up in proper sequence like magic, and the game was won.

A familiar step on the gravel, and the rattle of a latchkey, and Mrs. Grey looked eagerly up with a smile on her face.

"I don't believe in omens," she murmured; "but the coincidence is curious."

The door opened, and Evelyn came in slowly. She crossed the room to her mother and stooped to kiss her.

"My dearie," Mrs. Grey said tenderly, "how white you look. Tell me, what did the Committee do? I have been thinking of that poor girl all day."

Evelyn moved away before she answered, sank into a chair at the other side of the fireplace, and took off her gloves.

"The Committee, mother, did what they were told."

Mrs. Grey laughed.

"What a triumph!"

"It was," Evelyn said, looking into the fire, "for Mr. Glynn."

"Then he stood by you like a man."

Evelyn gave a laugh which jarred upon Mrs. Grey.

"My dear mother, he rescued me. It was Ivanhoe over again. After the trumpet had sounded the third time, after all seemed lost, he came, and with his single arm overthrew every opponent without effort. Even General Gainsborough went down before him; Major Hamer fell without a blow. Seriously," she added, sitting up and speaking in a different tone, "he was splendid, and has put everything right. He is actually taking Joe to live with him. In some mysterious way he has made my thief his slave, and Giles is his sworn

retainer; and I can see the Committee is going to follow suit. Isn't it capital?"

"And you, my dear?" Mrs. Grey spoke quietly, but with an emphasis sufficiently significant to make Evelyn very cautious in her answer. She was crossing the room to take off her things, and now came round behind her mother's chair and kissed her on the forehead.

"I cannot tell. I ought to like him, for he has won for me what I could not have won for myself. He is very modest about it, too. His manners," she gave a little laugh, "are irreproachable, and I would trust him with untold gold. And yet, I am not sure that I am at all grateful to Mr. Brooke for sending him to Relton, which might mean that I am jealous; but does not, as it happens. I think it really means that for the first time in all my life, mother mine, I am afraid of the power of a man."

CHAPTER XVII

GIVEN AWAY

AMY BENT nearly lost her life by her escapade of Monday night. It brought on a sharp attack of pneumonia, and for twenty-four hours Dr. Stansfield believed that she would succumb. But a good constitution, a mind at rest, skilful treatment, and good nursing saved her, and by Friday morning she was almost out of danger.

No one was allowed to see her, but Dr. Stansfield brought news daily to Evelyn. He had contracted a habit of dropping into the office at odd moments—hardly a correct proceeding for an avowed enemy of the Society. He said it was to show that he had forgiven the Committee.

On Friday afternoon Evelyn called at No. 18. Her visit had little to do with Amy. She had learnt through Giles that the Symeses knew Percival Nyne, and that the services of the prize-fighter were to be enlisted against him in some way. Giles had been very cautious and vague, and in ordinary circumstances Evelyn would have thought little of the matter, and cared less. But the circumstances were far from being ordinary. The atmosphere of mystery in the office which she had detected on Tuesday morning was deepening every day. Giles was silent and preoccupied; Mr. Glynn, though he came daily to work, was unaccountably absent from the office for hours together, and, as a last straw, Dr. Stansfield, the most gossipy of men, had shut himself up like the blade of a knife when on one occasion Evelyn had innocently remarked upon the probable rage and discomfort of mind that Percival Nyne must now be suffering at the rescue of Joe.

Something momentous and critical was clearly in the wind, and by Friday Evelyn felt she could endure the sus-

pense no longer. Her pride forbade further appeal to Giles or Mr. Glynn, and she determined to see what she could find out for herself at No. 18.

Mrs. Symes was behind the counter in her shop, but when Evelyn said she had come for a chat about Amy, Mrs. Symes opened the door of the room with the red curtains, and ushered her visitor in there.

"There's no call for anxiety now about that gell," she said, in answer to a question. "There never was, to my thinking. Doctor three times a day, a nurse all the night, and everything she needs regardless. Why, a princess could not have had more; she were bound to rally."

"Amy has found kind friends, here," Evelyn said pleasantly.

"Friends! Has she?" Mrs. Symes said, tossing her head and looking at her visitor out of the corners of her shrewd eyes. "I don't know so much about that. She has one."

"I meant you, Mrs. Symes, and your husband. If you had not taken Amy in when you did, nothing could have saved her life—if what I hear is true."

Mrs. Symes gave a contemptuous sniff, and her face became as hard as nails.

"If I may make so bold, miss," she said stiffly, "do you believe all you hear in the Nile? I see I had better tell you the truth of it. I don't say what my Tom might not have done—he's such a softy where gells is concerned—but I'd have you know I'm not made that way. We took Amy because we were well paid for it, and if any one asks you the question, perhaps you will be so good as to say that's the only reason, especially if you happen to meet my landlord, Mr. Nyne."

Evelyn gave a nod of intelligence. This was very interesting.

"You do not wish him to think you wanted to take Amy. I see."

The woman laughed harshly.

"If it comes to wishing, I don't wish him to know she is *here at all.* But that is too much to expect. He's bound

to smell it out through that Prickett woman—an old 'nose' of his. What I can do, though, is to make it clear to him and to all—and it's the truth—that I took the girl because I had to, and because I was paid a fortune to do it."

"That was by Mr. Glynn?" Evelyn said quickly, at which Mrs. Symes regarded her with a grim smile, and made her wish she had held her tongue.

"Mr. Glynn it was, miss," she said. "He'll pay the doctor, and he's paid the nurse, and more than all—I don't mind saying it to you—he's guaranteed us, me and my husband, against all accidents. And if this gell gets well—as she will—and if Joe Cramp gets clear—which he may—and if Percival Nyne, my landlord, gets his due—which the Lord grant—it won't be through me, nor your Society—which, begging your pardon, has brought all this bother about, to my thinking—nor the little doctor, with his tongue a-waggin' everywhere, like a puppy dog's tail, but just through that one man, miss, your Mr. Glynn."

Mrs. Symes said this with significant emphasis. She had formed a theory about John's motives for this amazing campaign of his in the Nile, and had been eagerly waiting for an opportunity of seeing Evelyn to prove its correctness. She had heard something of "the lady" from Joe at times, and a great deal from Amy this morning, and never did one woman measure another with a keener eye than Mrs. Symes appraised Evelyn now. But she had to confess herself baffled. Her visitor met both her words and the searching gaze that accompanied them with perfect serenity and coolness.

"What you say does not surprise me," she answered. "Mr. Glynn is one of those people who do what they do with all their might. I should be sorry for Mr. Percival Nyne if he were not such a rascal. I am sure before Mr. Glynn has done with him he will make him pay dearly for his abominable crime. What do you think?"

This was a most jesuitical speech, and shows to what moral straits unsatisfied curiosity can reduce people of more than ordinary sincerity.

As a matter of fact, Evelyn did not much believe that Mr. Glynn would concern himself now with such a person as Nyne. But she was quite sure Mrs. Symes had reason for being afraid of that man, and hoped by her artless remark to acquire useful information.

That this would have been the case was extremely probable, for the implied contempt in Evelyn's tone for the "King of the Nile" made Mrs. Symes very angry, but before she could answer there was a gentle knock at the half-open parlour door, and who should appear but Mr. Nyne himself.

If Mrs. Symes had not been a woman of very strong nerves, she would have screamed. Being what she was, she only turned a little paler than usual, and in a voice so soft and ingratiating that Evelyn could scarcely believe that it came from her lips, wished the intruder good-afternoon and bid him come in.

He obeyed, not troubling himself to remove his hat, nor paying the least attention to Evelyn, though she instinctively rose from her chair.

"I want the master," he said curtly; "where is he?"

Mrs. Symes gave an exclamation of well-simulated annoyance.

"There! I told him it was not right to leave the shop this afternoon. But you know what he is, sir. If he had had a notion you would look round he'd never have gone. But he ain't far, I believe. If you step over to the 'George' opposite I am sure you'll find him."

"Thank'ee," Mr. Nyne answered, taking a chair and laying his hat on the table, "I am tired, and if you'll run across and tell him to come over, I'll wait for him here."

This was turning the tables all round. Mrs. Symes desired nothing less than to leave Mr. Nyne in her private apartments, while Evelyn made a hasty movement to go. At this Mrs. Symes said quickly:

"Stay a minute, miss. I must fetch my man for the guv'nor, and I want a few words with you badly about my little Bessie. I'll be back in no time. Don't go."

She suited the action to the word by darting off without

waiting for a reply, closing the shop door behind her. This left Evelyn in the position of having to beat an obvious retreat, or endure a tête-à-tête with Mr. Nyne. She chose the latter course, partly because she was ashamed of the instinctive dread she felt in his presence, partly because it suddenly struck her that something might be gained by crossing swords with this source of all evil in the Nile.

Mr. Nyne, as it happened, wished for the same thing. He had recognised Evelyn's voice when he was in the shop. He had overheard every word of her last speech, and his suggestion to Mrs. Symes was made for a deliberate purpose.

As the shop door closed he rose with a deferential bow.

"A thousand apologies, madam," he said, with a stealthy, calculated politeness which gave Evelyn a most improper desire to strike him with her umbrella. "I am a short-sighted man; I did not see a lady was in the room. Why, if I am not mistaken, we have met before. You were with a young fellow, one Joe Cramp, last Monday evening. You are the lady from the Society. This is a remarkable coincidence. I was going to call upon you to-day to give you certain information concerning that fellow. Since we've met I have been told he robbed your office. Is that true? And assaulted you, I hear."

He rubbed his chin cunningly, with a coarse leer in his eyes, which made Evelyn breathless with loathing. But she controlled herself, and looked back into the smiling face with quiet scorn.

"I should be glad to know why you ask me that question," she replied, "considering how well you know the answer."

He drew back his head at the thrust, and turned it reflectively on one side.

"I know most things in the Nile, and most men. I know you forgave him on consideration that he came before your Committee. Did he come?"

The question was jerked out like a pistol shot, but Evelyn was on her guard, or thought she was.

"When I have the pleasure of knowing your business——"

she began, then paused, looking at him under drooping eyelids.

He laughed, baring his front teeth. "Then he did not come. I thought he would not. Luckily I know where he is to be found, and can inform the police. We must make an example of this fellow. The good name of the Nile, madam, is very dear to me. This is my home."

Evelyn's eyes kindled. The impudent effrontery and unction of the man's tone gave her an overmastering desire to trample on him. She forgot everything else. "You will be glad to hear," she said, "that Joe's whereabouts are known, as well as the name of the scoundrel who tempted him to rob me. The good name of the Nile is in strong hands."

Evelyn had a clear voice, and a remarkably distinct articulation. Therefore Mrs. Symes, who was in the shop, returning from an unsuccessful search for her husband, heard all that she said. The result was to hasten her steps, and as Evelyn ended, she opened the parlour door.

Mr. Nyne was standing near it, hat in hand. His face was quiet, though a little more colourless than usual. But the unctuous smile had vanished. His thin lips were closed, his eyes expressionless, and his head and neck bent like a snake's when it has received a blow.

At Mrs. Symes's entrance he made Evelyn a low bow, and moved to the door.

"I thank you, madam," he said, in his customary cold tone, "for your information. Mrs. Symes, tell the master I will call another time."

When he was gone, Mrs. Symes sat down with a long sigh.

"Well, I never did!" she said hopelessly. "What will happen now? Oh Lord, what will happen now?"

She began to fan herself with her apron, and rock to and fro. "To think you knows no more than that! To think any one in her senses over and above the age o' three would go and put the guv'nor on his guard, and just now, with all *that they have* prepared for him, and all he has for Joe—

Well! well! well!—I never heard the like, and that's all about it."

She gave a helpless laugh, and fanned herself again.

Evelyn flushed hotly.

"I do not quite understand you," she said.

"That's more than likely," the woman said sharply. "But there," catching herself up, "you ain't to blame, I daresay, and if you are, it ain't my place to say so, and if it were I shouldn't say it, for we are in the same boat now, all of us, and must stand the racket together, and folk placed that way must not waste breath having words."

Evelyn's face became grave and serious.

"If I have been indiscreet," she said, "I am very sorry. But I am entirely in the dark. What can this man do to you or me, because I tell him, as he deserves to be told, that he is a scoundrel?"

"'Tain't that," Mrs. Symes rejoined. "That would do good, if anything. But you told him he was found out. He overheard you say he would pay for it, and worst of all, you said you knowed Joe Cramp's address. Now these things were just what he were not to know. But I'll say no more; what's done is done. Tom will be in soon. I'll tell him, and he'll see Alfred Giles. But don't forget, if I may make so bold, to keep very clear in future of the guv'nor. Whatever you do after this, don't wander round the Nile after dark, remember that, for mercy's sake, or if he ever gets the chance he'll have you like a rabbit in a net, and murder ye."

A customer now came in, and Mrs. Symes retired to the shop, and Evelyn took her leave.

She had learned something since she left the office, something she did not expect. And yet the mystery was darker than before. There was only one course to take now. She must ask at once to be taken into Mr. Glynn's confidence, and confess what she had done.

CHAPTER XVIII

GILES'S PLAN OF CAMPAIGN

EVELYN found Mr. Glynn and Giles at the office when she came in fresh from her interview with Mrs. Symes. They were deep in consultation over something. It was easy for her to guess now what that might be.

"I have some news," she said, "which I must tell you at once. I have done a very foolish thing."

Then she told them all, sparing nothing, and repeating Mrs. Symes's remarks verbatim. They received her tidings in different ways. Giles became very grave, and after a significant glance at Mr. Glynn, heaved a sigh, and pushed his hands deeply into his pockets. Mr. Glynn looked amused.

"I am afraid you had an unpleasant time," he said. "Mrs. Symes is no respecter of persons. Her tongue will have its way. But perhaps she is none the worse for that."

Evelyn flushed.

"It was my tongue which was to blame. I fear I have done great harm by my mistake."

"The mistake was mine," John said quickly. "I ought to have told you our plans. But it really matters very little, very little indeed."

He spoke in a kindly, reassuring tone, which might have been comforting to Evelyn, had it not been for Giles. There was something, however, in the expression of the old man's face which she did not at all like. It made her think that Mr. Glynn was treating her like a child.

"It is very good of you to say that," she replied, in a constrained voice, "but I cannot take your words seriously. *Giles," she turned* upon him with a sharp appeal, "tell me

what I have done, and all that I have done. Unless you think I am unworthy of any confidence at all."

Giles looked uncomfortable.

"Come, come, Miss Grey," he said in a soothing tone, "don't ye say that. There's nothing of that sort on our minds, nor ever was. The best thing now is to fix ourselves on what's to come. At the same time, as I know you"—here he smiled slily—"I'll tell you what you want first, with Mr. Glynn's leave."

"By all means," John replied. "But please assure Miss Grey, Giles, that I meant what I said."

"That, sir," Giles rejoined gravely, "Miss Grey, if she will pardon me for saying so, should be sure of without any word from me, for she knows you."

"But I am not sure," Evelyn said, smiling. "Remember that I don't see nearly as much of Mr. Glynn as you do, Giles."

The old man chuckled rather wickedly.

"Ah, that will come, miss. There's been so much going on outside, you see. Then I think the best thing for me is to tell ye something he has done."

"That's not what Miss Grey meant," John interposed. "Be careful, Giles, or you shall tell nothing."

Giles rubbed his hands with recovered cheerfulness.

"You leave me alone, if you please, Mr. Glynn, to go about it my own way. Miss Grey, these here were the facts:—

"Mr. Glynn and me, as I told you Tuesday, consulted a heap that Monday evening about Joe's business. The result was we came to the conclusion it would be no good just a-laying hold of Joe by the neck, in a manner of speaking, and pulling him, with his girl, out of the Nile.

"We found, through information we received, that Nyne was at work, with many behind him, to get hold of others the same way; and that unless he were stopped in a manner that would show him up to all, not only as a bad 'un—they know that—but as a bad 'un who had been beat, things would be only the worse in the end than they were at the beginning. In other words, by getting Joe out and doing

no more we'd only bring the Nile about our ears, with Nyne egging 'em on. We must beat Nyne down. So we planned out a way to cook the guv'nor in his own sauce. We found that on Monday evening next he intended pulling Joe into a crime much worse than the job at this office, a burglary; and to do it in a manner which would show all the guns—that's the thieves—in the Nile the power he has. There was to be a little meeting at a certain place, and a drink, and young Joe be initiated as a cracksman. Our scheme was to let this all go on, and let Nyne think he had Joe tight until that meeting, at which Mr. Glynn and me and Tom Symes would get in among them, and at the right moment Joe was to speak out what Nyne was, and what he thought of him, and come right over to us, and so let down the guv'nor before all his friends. After that I was to say a word or two appropriate to the occasion, as the parsons say, and Mr. Glynn follow on and clinch the thing by showing them that he had come here to stay. Tom Symes was then to finish up, as a former pal of Nyne's. I need not tell you that to bring this off the guv'nor should not have an inkling we was on his track or Joe's. Now——" Giles paused dramatically. "Well, of course, now he knows we are after him, our little game is off, as the sports say. That's all, miss."

Evelyn looked deeply depressed.

"Is there nothing to be done?" she said desperately.

Giles shook his head, with a deep sigh, yet the expression of his face was that of a man waiting.

"What says Mr. Glynn?" he said solemnly.

John spoke with decision. "Calculating all the chances," he said, "my opinion is we are in a better position than we were. You have driven a second nail into Nyne's coffin, Miss Grey. We owe you thanks."

The colour swept into Evelyn's face with a rush.

"If I could only feel that; but how can it be?"

"I will tell you," John went on, in a matter-of-fact tone, while Giles nearly choked himself in an attempt to convert a surreptitious chuckle into a cough without having an *apoplectic* fit in the process.

"Nyne is in such a strong position in the Nile that he will think little of my attack. Joe is safe not to give us away, neither will Tom Symes or his wife, for their own sakes. Now the boys around here, if our information is correct, are expecting to see Joe join the gang of cracksmen on Monday night, and it is necessary for Nyne that they should not be disappointed. Therefore the meeting will come off. All he will do is to be particularly careful that no police are about, and that he has plenty of friends with him. That will be so much the better for us."

Evelyn looked puzzled.

"But surely that will place you in great danger. Your head will be in the lion's mouth."

"That is true," John answered, with a coolness that made Giles bite his lips; "but we shall get through. In the first place, my friend, Mr. Brabant, will come with us. He is one of the coolest and bravest men I know. In the second place, we have Tom Symes, the prize-fighter, who, next to Nyne himself, is the most influential man in the Nile, as well as the strongest, and Symes, wittingly or unwittingly"—here he caught Giles's eye—"according to the plans I have made, will turn the scale in our favour."

Evelyn looked relieved.

"Thank you," she said, with grateful eyes. "I can see, now, that I was very foolish. But if you really feel that it makes no difference——"

"I do honestly feel it," John said, meeting her glance. "We shall do our business quite easily, thanks to Giles."

This was too much for the old man.

"I have noticed in my experience, Miss Grey," he said drily, "that however truthful a man may be by nature, there's always times when he will say a thing more than a little wide of the mark. Mr. Glynn might have saved his breath, I think."

Evelyn went home in good time that evening, and Giles and John left the office together. At the gate they found a man leaning against the railings waiting for them. He touched his cap to John, and placed a note in his hand.

"No answer," he said. "Deputy will meet you at the old place to-morrow, noon."

It was a dark night, and the man's face was almost invisible, as he had on a coat with an immense collar, and his cap was pulled down to his ears. But John recognised him. It was the little pickpocket who had nearly lost his life at the hands of the doss-house drudge.

The note was a pencil scrawl.

"'Ware snakes," it said. "He knows all."

"I think, Giles," said John, after reading it, "that we'll dine in the City Road this evening, if you are not otherwise engaged."

They sat down to their meal in silence, and until they got to the stage of coffee talked of indifferent things. At last Giles said, with a laugh:

"You turned the corner well, sir, with Miss Grey. Lord! I never saw anything done better. It was right, too, for she must not know what she has done, poor young lady. But she has let us in, proper."

"I think not," John answered.

Giles blew rings from his cigar.

"I fail to catch your meaning, sir, or we look at it with different eyes. To my mind we are done brown, or very near it. See what Malony says. He knows, you may depend. We'll have to fall back on the police."

"Then we lose the Nile," John said; "and that must not be. I want to feel, after Monday, that we have gained it, or a good slice of it, thieves and all. A scheme I have in my mind depends on that—a scheme by which Miss Grey, with Mr. Brabant, will be able to start a certain piece of work in Relton. Before that can begin, however, we must pull up the weeds, which means Percival Nyne."

"Accepting that, sir," Giles said, with a curious abruptness of tone, "though I think still that we are in a tight place, how about afterwards? If this scheme is yours—ain't you going to work it yourself? Why should another reap what you have sown?"

"I am not sowing for myself, I have told you."

Giles puffed furiously at his cigar.

"You have, sir, and I know what you mean; but I don't like it any the more for that. I am an old man, and have known the world in my time, and I know you, Mr. Glynn, and it about breaks my heart—but I'll say no more." He gave a deep sigh. "It's not my place at all. Let us come back to Percival Nyne."

John laid a tender hand on the old agent's knee.

"Giles, Giles, you think far too much about me. I must put up with it, I suppose, but it is a weakness in your nature, partner. Now, business. I do not deny that we are in a tight place, but I have a way out. There is a boxing saloon, you told me once, at 'The Grapes.'"

Giles's eyes sparkled.

"Now, I never thought of that. You mean to have 'em up there, then, and take 'em on—you, a 'sport' from America. I suppose, now, you feel able to handle any one, almost, but the biggest."

A queer smile came into John's face, but was instantly repressed.

"I was taught well in New York, as it happened," he said gravely, "for I had rough work to do out West. Sullivan had me put right through the mill. My idea about Monday was that, as Relton men are mostly boxers, a turn-up such as you suggest would be the best way of making friends with them."

"The very best," Giles said, "and the surest one to dish the old geeser. It will hold Tom Symes, too. We'll make him judge."

"Yes, we'll make him judge," John replied, smiling again in a way which, this time, caught Giles's attention.

"I see you don't trust the eighty-one-tonner, sir," he said. "No more do I. Nyne will make for him at once, seeing that Miss Grey was in his house this afternoon, and pin him down."

"You must see him to-morrow," John said in an absent tone. "Please tell your Superintendent we shall not need the police."

Giles threw away the end of his cigar, and slowly rubbed his hands.

"You have a card up your sleeve, Mr. Glynn."

John nodded.

"I play it on Monday night."

CHAPTER XIX

PASSING THE LOVE OF WOMAN

JOHN left the City Road restaurant at half-past eight, and an hour later settled down to spend an evening with Dick. It was the first they had spent together since John received his introduction to Edward Brooke. They had met casually at breakfast, for John had been living in Hampstead for three days, and once at lunch, so that Dick knew what was going on. But until to-night there had not been an opportunity to discuss the situation in detail.

When Dick heard that he was expected to take part in Monday's meeting, he gave an exclamation of annoyance.

"My dear fellow, it's the Wendovers' 'At Home.' All the Society goes, and it is the only chance I shall get of seeing Evelyn for ages. By-the-bye, Lady Wendover gave me this to-day," pulling a letter out of his pocket and tossing it to John. "She has heard of you from General Gainsborough. You must come with me and let the meeting rip."

John read the letter.

"It is all right," he said. "The 'At Home' begins at 8.45, and we are not due in Relton till 11, at the earliest. That will give us an hour and a half at Park Lane."

Dick sat up.

"Park Lane and Relton are not next door, my good friend."

John placidly filled his pipe.

"I think the horses will do it in half an hour. Ted, my new coachman, said he would take us from Hampstead in that time. He knows town, that man."

Dick gasped.

"Your what? Have you started an establishment already?

A mansion in Mayfair, I suppose. Coach and four perhaps. Let me down gently, but don't keep me in suspense. What on earth have you been doing?"

John smiled.

"Putting things straight for Monday—and after, that is all. It is easy to get into a place like the Nile, but the getting out needed preparation. I have bought a buggy—I mean a carriage and a pair of horses—and engaged two men. They are fixed up in some mews in Belsize now. We can change our clothes as we run down and lose no time, and if things go a little crooked, there will be no need to walk home. That was my idea."

"And the two men. What do you know of them? Anything?"

"I heard of them yesterday from the carriage builder. They are brothers. I met them by appointment this morning and tried both with the gloves. Then wired to their references and got a satisfactory reply this afternoon. They are all right."

Dick gave a shout of laughter.

"Oh, why was I not there to see the boxing? I presume they are in hospital, poor fellows."

John did not laugh.

"I want men who can use their hands now, and afterwards. They are all right. It will be useful on Monday."

"Monday, Monday, Monday," Dick exclaimed irritably. "What a concentrated animal you are, John. I will come with you, of course, though it is a bore having to run away from the Wendovers! a confounded fag to dress and undress twice in one evening. But I really cannot see that the world would come to an end if your pet thief were hanged and Nyne worked his wicked will. Evelyn can never do anything in the Nile."

John pulled at his pipe for a minute without answering, then he said:

"I think so, with your help."

Dick started and dropped his pipe.

"What do you mean by that?"

John left his chair and stood with his back to the fire, where he could see Dick's face.

"That depends on you," he said slowly. "On Sunday night you told me something. Because of what you told me I went to Relton. Now——" he paused, and Dick, watching him, saw that there was a curious hardness in his face, as if he were forcing himself to speak. "Now, friend, I have a scheme. But first, I want to know your intentions regarding Evelyn Grey. Give them to me a second time, will you?"

He turned away to knock the ashes from his pipe; then put it in his pocket and folded his arms, as one who holds himself ready to meet a shock.

Dick was not slow to answer him. He was on his feet by this time, leaning against the table opposite. But while John's face was set and hard, his friend's was aflame with excitement.

"Are you a wizard, John?" he cried joyously, "or what? Have you been tracking me as you trailed those Mexican murderers? By thunder, I should not be surprised by the look of you now if my life were worth no more than theirs. It is strange, very strange," he went on in a dreamy tone, "that you should strike now the very subject I was going to speak upon to-night. It is as if our thoughts had been running on the same line all the week."

"Your thoughts," John interrupted with a twitch of impatience in his voice, "have run on what?"

Dick laughed.

"Evelyn, old friend, Evelyn, Evelyn, Evelyn. While you have grubbed in the Nile, striking thieves, and hob-nobbing with dear old Giles, storming common lodging-houses, electrifying committees, and rescuing fair damsels like the doughty champion you are, and always were, and will be, I have been pretending to write, as usual, but all the while dreaming of Evelyn Grey. John, I am a different man, a new man. Have you patience to listen while I tell you all about it?"

"I am here," John answered, while his face grew harder still, "to listen."

"It won't take long," Dick cried, plunging his hands in his pockets with another laugh. "On Sunday I told you that I had agreed to be her friend—no more. That night I dreamed of her. You were in it too. I dreamed she cared, and that you told me so. I woke up hot all over and have hardly slept since. What I have to tell you now is, that on Sunday I was a fool. I cannot give her up. I cannot be her friend. I love her now as I have never loved her yet. That is why I am so keen for Monday evening. I shall go slow with her, of course. Good God, what a hill I have to climb. But I am going on and on. She is the only woman I have ever loved—ever really loved. She is the only woman I will ever marry. Is that enough? Do you know now what I mean? you old granite Glynn."

He had paced the room in his restless way as he talked. Now he turned sharply to look into John's face, hoping to find a smile upon it answering his own, a grip of the hand, and to hear a hearty "well done!" But none of these things happened, and he was chilled. John stood as before, with folded arms, looking into vacancy.

"I know," was all he said. Then after a pause, "the scheme holds."

Dick sank back upon the table again.

"Then let me hear the scheme, old man." He spoke cheerfully, but he felt ill at ease. There was something in John's face he did not understand. For the first time since their friendship began, he felt half afraid of him.

"What is in your mind?" he went on. "Come, I have told you all that is in mine."

John's face relaxed at these words, yet Dick, now keenly observant, saw that his lips were still tightly drawn as if he were in pain.

"I was thinking," he said absently, "how things might come about. But I can't talk of it to-night. You must wait till after Monday. It is all square, lad."

His hands dropped and he leant back against the mantelpiece with a movement as if he were tired, but he met Dick's *anxious look* with his old genial smile.

"You were right in all you said about Miss Grey."

Dick's face glowed with pleasure.

"Thank you, old man, for that, though I knew you would think so when once you had seen her."

"I know her," John continued, "pretty well now. That is what made me ask you questions. These things have two sides."

He paused, and Dick's eyes opened wonderingly; but he kept still, for once, and listened.

"I have only been five days at Relton," John continued. "But it seems longer. I went there, thinking of you. I wanted to do work for the Society, but I owed a debt to you, and saw a chance of paying an instalment."

Dick gave an exclamation.

"I knew it, though I dare not say so, John. I owe everything to you. This new hope, and now your scheme to help. You have paid your debt, as you call it, a hundred times."

John smiled a little grimly.

"You always cross a river, boy, before you come to it. What I want to say is this. I went for your sake, but having seen her, it came to me that there was another thing I must know. No man shall win Evelyn Grey unless all his soul and strength are in it. No man." He was frowning, and his voice held a biting sound within it which struck the listener. "You have said," he continued, more quietly, "that there is a hill to climb. That is true. That hill tired you last Sunday. Dick, no man that gets tired will ever climb that hill. If I thought that you would ever be tired again, I should not help you now. You see my meaning."

"I do, John," Dick replied humbly. "But I shall never be tired, never; you will see."

John laid both hands on his friend's shoulders, his strong fingers closing upon them with a grip that made Dick wince.

"I want to see that, believe me."

His voice had changed. There was an appeal, almost a question, which made Dick wonder more and more.

"Of course I believe you," he said, "I tell you if I win her, it will be your work."

John let him go.

"That is foolishness," he said shortly. "I may help to find a way, but you will have to take it, follow it, and climb by your own strength. I cannot help you there."

Dick raised his head proudly.

"I want no help. Do you ever read poetry? Of course you don't. But you will, if you are ever in love. Read Tennyson then, and this," he picked up a book from the table and read aloud:

> "'Heart, are you great enough
> For a love that never tires?
> Oh, heart, are you great enough for love?
> I have heard of thorns and briars.
> Over the thorns and briars,
> Over the meadows and stiles,
> Over the world to the end of it
> Flash—for a million miles.'"

He gave a laugh, closed the book sharply, and threw it on to the couch.

There was a long pause.

"That is good sense," John said at last. He took a note for reference that the book had a green cover.

CHAPTER XX

THE ROOT OF THE MATTER

LADY WENDOVER was one of the most devoted members of the Society. Her husband, Sir James Wendover, member of Parliament and active partner in a large City bank, had little time to give to the work, though he was a whole-hearted and influential supporter of its principles and a generous subscriber to its funds. But Lady Wendover gave herself. She was honorary secretary in one of the districts, she attended all the meetings of the Central Council in Villiers Place, she was a member of several sub-committees, and a most indefatigable organiser of drawing-room meetings, friendly dinner parties, and sociable "At Homes" of S. I. C. P. workers.

The function of Monday evening was the event of the year of its kind. No one who was not actively connected with the work of the Society was invited, but Lady Wendover expected six hundred guests.

John was looking forward to this "At Home." It is often supposed that a man from the prairies invariably dislikes society, but it is a mistake. Some hunger for it, and feel when they stand, after many years of solitary life, in a crowded street or room, like a child at its first party, excited and amused at the strangeness and novelty of the dresses and the scene.

He was there early, for Dick was in a fever of impatience to see as much of Evelyn as possible, and they arrived with the first flight of guests.

At the announcement of John's name, Lady Wendover gave Evelyn, who on these occasions helped her aunt to receive guests, a significant glance, and went forward to

greet the new worker in the Society with gracious welcome in her face and anxious curiosity in her heart.

John was already famous. In the S. I. C. P. as in all congregations of persons who share a common purpose, work for a common cause, and frequently meet to talk about it, and one another, such an event as the robbery of a district office would become known to most of the principal members of the Society within five days at furthest. Mr. Brooke had officially mentioned this interview, and Mr. Glynn's departure to Relton, to members of his council; General Gainsborough had talked of little else since Tuesday evening, and Evelyn, though much more reticent, had, in duty bound, answered many questions.

Lady Wendover was much exercised in her mind by what she heard. It was one of her principles that every earnest worker in the Society should be taken up socially and made to feel that he or she was one of a group of friends. On the other hand, Lady Wendover was rather particular in her choice of friends, and was old-fashioned, people said, in her notions of gentility. Now, while the new worker's ability and strength of purpose were praised, murmurs of "a rough diamond" followed the eulogy, and amused shakings of the head. This made her ladyship extremely nervous.

John was mercifully unaware of the ordeal he was to undergo. He made his bow, conversed a few moments with his hostess, noticed, as every one did, the likeness between Evelyn and her aunt; admired her ladyship as one of the most dignified and kindly gentlewomen he had ever seen, and so passed on to greet his secretary, and then to follow Dick to be introduced to a score of other people.

"Evelyn, my dear," Lady Wendover whispered to her niece in a brief pause of the reception of guests, "why did you call him a grizzly bear?"

"He chose the name for himself," Evelyn answered, smiling. "I told you it was only manner."

"But his manners are excellent," explained her ladyship with enthusiasm; "a little stiff and formal, possibly, but *that will wear off.* I never met a man less self-conscious

or more self-restrained. A pity Mr. Brabant is not more like his friend there. How well he carries himself, and he wears his clothes perfectly. He would have beautiful hands, too, if they were not so hard. I shall ask him to dinner, and you must be there."

A crowd of guests now came in, and her ladyship was swept away, leaving Evelyn with a quaint smile on her face. Her aunt generally liked and disliked people in superlatives; but, after all, was she this time very far wrong?"

In the pauses of conversation with the many people who sought her out, and often while listening to their talk, Evelyn observed Mr. Glynn as he was introduced to this person and that, and was drawn into conversation with several people at the same time; and though she would not have admitted it, she felt that, after all, perhaps she had misrepresented him. He could talk, and talk well. He was clearly making a good impression. For some unknown reason, it appeared as if he reserved all abruptness, reticence, and queer aloofness of manner for her society. The idea seemed a little absurd, but as Evelyn looked back at the last week, particularly since the afternoon she saw Percival Nyne, she felt no doubt about it. There must be some reason for this. It piqued her, and even though she knew he had cause to be silent and preoccupied, she blamed him in her heart. A *gentleman* should find opportunity for courtesy whatever happened. Here a sudden thought struck her. There was one explanation, he might have taken a dislike to her personally and find it easier to work at a distance. This notion, though not quite new, had never been seriously entertained until this moment. To-night it seemed very probable. It was depressing, but if there were anything in it the situation must be faced. Evelyn was a person who loved definiteness above all things. The question was, how to find out for certain? An instrument, however, came to her hand at this moment exactly fitted for her purpose—Dick Brabant.

Dick was in high spirits. A little nervous, for he had hardly met Evelyn since a certain momentous interview, but

hopeful. He had been thinking over his position a great deal since the talk with John, and it struck him as significant that Evelyn had taken the news that he was to plunge into the politics of the Nile and the affair to-night, without making any protest or surprise. Being an imaginative and sanguine person, he had built upon this quite a respectable castle. "She is not so far away as I feared," he said to John; "she may even have regretted—no, that is nonsense; but if a woman allows a man whom she knows has cared for her to serve her in a special way, it argues some liking and certainly trust in him. And that is a good foundation to begin upon, don't you think?"

John did not say what he thought. Since Friday night he had avoided discussing Evelyn with his friend. He would not admit that he had any particular reason for this. But he knew, in his heart, that there was a reason.

"What terrible news is this I hear?" Dick said to Evelyn. "It is reported that the centre of gravity of Relton—your Committee—has been shaken to its foundations, and the Nile is up in arms. Is this true?"

"If Mr. Glynn says so," Evelyn answered demurely.

Dick shook his head in emphatic denial.

"John, good Heavens no! He never says anything where he is concerned. It was General Gainsborough. But I hope you are grateful to me for sending you my friend?"

Evelyn smiled a non-committal smile.

"I think you ought to ask Mr. Glynn that question. Perhaps you have. I wonder if I might hear his answer?"

Dick laughed.

"He would be puzzled to find one, I should think, seeing that he has brought everything on himself. Seriously, there is no doubt about what he thinks. He has been enjoying himself immensely, especially the last few days."

This interested Evelyn. Mr. Glynn had been out of the office most of the time during the last few days.

"He seems to find the machinations of Mr. Nyne very absorbing."

Dick frowned. He did not like her tone.

"That is a difficult question to answer. My friend always says least when the hardest knocks are going."

"He is fond of fighting."

Dick's teeth closed over his moustache.

"I wonder whether he has told you why he fights or may fight this evening. I rather think not."

"I know all about it," she said, the indifference of tone which angered Dick slightly more pronounced, perhaps intentionally. "It appears to Mr. Glynn to be the best way of emancipating Joe from the evil influences of that man Percival Nyne."

"You know of no other reason, then?"

"What other reason could there be?"

"That is for Mr. Glynn to say."

Evelyn glanced at him with eyes in which there was now no pretence of indifference, and then unfolded her fan. The room seemed to have become unpleasantly warm.

"Will you please tell me exactly what you mean?" she said. "I see I have been kept in the dark again. Do you think it is fair?"

"I do not," Dick replied after a moment of hesitation, "so I will tell you. The chief reason why my friend goes to-night to this beer-house in Crisp Street—'The Grapes,' a hole which, if it were out West, he would not approach without a loaded Winchester rifle—is to secure your safety in the Nile."

He paused to watch the effect of his words.

She would not be pleased, probably, but that was better than that she should think they were amusing themselves, risking their lives for this miserable thief.

Evelyn was not pleased.

"Thank you," she said in a constrained tone. "This is very surprising news. I was not aware that my safety was in question at all. I really think I am able, with all deference to Mr. Glynn, to take care of that myself."

"I am afraid you are not," Dick said, "since you met Mr. Nyne and gave him a piece of your mind. Ask Giles; ask

those people in Crisp Street, the Symes family; ask even General Gainsborough."

Evelyn fanned herself furiously.

"I am to understand, then, that a benevolent conspiracy has now been formed for my protection. I think I might have been consulted first. It is curious, too, I must say, that until Mr. Glynn came to the office no one ever thought such a thing to be necessary at all."

Her face was white with anger and offence, and Dick saw that he had thoroughly blundered. To make matters worse, John now left a group of people with whom he had been talking and came their way. Dick, however, was a cool hand under fire.

"You have taken my words too seriously. There is no conspiracy at all. The General, for instance, has no knowledge of what is going forward to-night. He only said the Nile was a dangerous place for a lady to visit in; and that is indisputable. But here is Mr. Glynn. Make him explain himself," and his eyes twinkled maliciously. He was in the mood now for a good rumpus all round.

John came up, watch in hand.

"We must be off, old man, in five minutes," he said. Then, perceiving electricity in the atmosphere, he turned to Evelyn. "Mr. Brabant has been telling you something blood-curdling. I hope it was not about to-night."

"I asked him some questions about to-night," Evelyn said quietly. "And he has told me the whole truth."

"Pardon," Dick interposed, "that is not quite correct. I said your safety was the chief reason, not the only one. John," he faced his friend squarely, "Miss Grey was annoyed that she did not know before how much her personal security in the Nile has to do with our little business to-night. I have now been candid on the point."

John's face stiffened.

"I am sorry," he said uncompromisingly. "I would rather we had done something before we talked about it."

"That is to say, to a woman," Evelyn interposed.

"I meant to you," he answered. "I will tell you why."

"You have not time."

"I must make time now."

He had drawn nearer to her and was looking with some intentness into her face; and Dick, standing by, felt a sudden curious sensation of isolation.

"Our object in raiding 'The Grapes' to-night," John said, "is to break Nyne's influence in the Nile, and open the way for yours."

"Mine!"

"Yours. Recollect that it was you, not I, who found out Amy Bent and saved Joe Cramp. I have helped. But you began it all and inspired what Giles and I have been doing since. I want to see all that you have done here repeated in other parts of the Nile. But it can never be while Nyne controls the place. I have not said this before, and should not have done so, but for Mr. Brabant's action, simply because it is going to be a very stiff business to break this man, and we may fail to-night. And if we do, there will be nothing you can safely attempt at present."

Evelyn was silent a moment before she answered. Her face wore its natural colour again and her eyes had softened.

"I see," she said in a different tone, though one that was still constrained, and Dick thought strangely cold. "But I want you to understand I think it of small importance that I was not told. What I have not understood, and do not quite understand now, is: Why it should be necessary for you to go down at night and meet such men as these on their own ground and risk even failure, which must also mean your great danger, when surely the police could overawe these scoundrels more completely even than Giles."

She spoke with a conviction that made Dick chafe desperately. He would have answered had not John silenced him with a gesture.

"You do not understand what I intend to do," he said. "That is natural, for these men are to you what you call them, scoundrels. But I have lived among such men and worse, and it has been my experience that to begin this work of ours—of yours—in the right way, we must give our-

selves for what we are worth to these men. We must meet Nyne and beat him, unarmed. Then, but only then, shall we stand a chance of shaking his hold of the Nile. If we went with the police behind us, we should do nothing at all."

He spoke very quietly, as one merely stating facts and not making any attempt at argument. At the end he turned to Dick:

"Time's up; we must go."

He bowed to Evelyn and made a movement to pass, but she held out her hand frankly, and, to Dick's surprise, her face was radiant.

"I do understand now," she exclaimed. "You are doing the best possible thing if it can be done. I wish, how I wish, I were a man to help you. Success!"

CHAPTER XXI

CASTING THE DIE

JOHN and his party reached Crisp Street punctually at eleven. At the corner of City Road they separated by arrangement, John going forward with Dick and Ted Tippetts, the coachman, a broad, heavily built man of forty, his brother Sam, a lithe stripling of twenty-one, following a few moments later.

The order given to the elder Tippetts was to keep within a few yards of his master, without any apparent collusion, and be ready to help him in any emergency. His brother was to remain within reach of the door, and, if he received a signal from Giles, depart forthwith to a certain shop in Crisp Street, where he would find a detective in plain clothes, who would thereupon bring the police to the rescue.

No worker in the S. I. C. P. would have recognised Dick to-night, and not one of the Relton members of committee would have admitted any acquaintance with John.

Both were dressed in coats and trousers of the broadest "check," striped waistcoats with pearl buttons of large size, and soft brown felt hats tilted jauntily over the left ear. They wore brown boots, and big brown overcoats with velvet collars, and entered "The Grapes" smoking enormous cigars.

"The Grapes" was crowded with men, and no sooner had John and Dick passed through the swing-doors than it appeared as if trouble were going to begin. No one took any direct notice of them, but when John, seeing Giles at the bar, moved that way, two men pushed roughly against him, and several more behind them were obviously awaiting his approach to do likewise. John received their attentions by inserting the point of his elbow between the ribs of the first,

and with one sharp thrust knocking the breath out of him, at the same time stamping on the feet of the second with agonising force. This had due effect. The other hustlers refrained, and Giles was reached without further difficulty.

"The bees are on the buzz," John said, as they shook hands; "they are in strength, too."

Giles nodded.

"I am rare glad to see ye both. This is going to be a hot 'un, Mr. Glynn. The guv'nor must have been foraging day and night among his friends. In all my experience, sir, I never saw so many guns and birds together in one place as there are here. The Nile is out, sure, and I will guarantee that if the police were to surround the place by the time Nyne gets in, they could cop all the worst cracksmen in London. I see your groom at the door. I fear we'll need to send him off soon. Look! look how they're coming in by the dozen. Phew! What a crowd!"

The swing-door was now hard at work, and the place crowding up to suffocation. Dick's face grew despondent.

"Our heads are in the lion's mouth," he said. "There is no way to tackle such a crowd as this."

John looked at Giles with a significant smile.

"There is the eighty-one tonner."

Giles groaned.

"Don't put any faith in him. My belief is that the guv'nor will make him toe the line."

John's face darkened.

"So much the worse, then, for Mr. Symes. Steady! here they come."

Four men came through the swing-doors, and mingled with the crowd, which made way for them readily. The first man was Nyne, following him were Joe Cramp and Ben Kipley the cracksman, arm in arm, and bringing up in the rear, filling the doorway with his bulk, and stooping to get in at all, big Tom.

Giles bent forward, gave them one keen glance, and swore a short, fierce oath.

"We've been done. Look at that d—d young fool."

Something was wrong with Joe. He walked fairly steadily, but his eyes were fixed and glassy, his face deeply flushed.

"They'll pretend he's drunk," Giles growled, "but that's not honest drink. You will get no word from him, and when trouble begins some one will push him over and stamp the life out of him. That will be the guv'nor's lesson to eighty-one, and he will let the Nile know it, too. That girl will never see her man any more. Look at Tom Symes now; see how he keeps his head turned from us. He's been nobbled, sir, mark my words—nobbled clean."

"There is no time to lose, then," John said, in a quiet, slow tone that made Dick's blood quicken and his heart leap. That tone brought back the grim old Western days.

Giles grunted.

"Ah, we shall have trouble to do that, and when we've done it, the guv'nor will take care we don't get out again."

"I think," John said, in a voice as soft as a murmuring stream, "that the guv'nor will have enough to do to take care of himself. Boy Brabant, vamos!"

He whispered the last words with an intonation that sent Dick's hand mechanically searching for a revolver, and made him laugh aloud.

The old days had come back for sure. John, grave worker for a charitable society, had given place to "granite Glynn" of the frontier, the dread of every "tough" and horse-thief from Albuquerque to Santa Fé.

"Giles," Dick whispered to the agent, "I know nothing about this 'guv'nor' of yours, but if a hair of Joe Cramp's head is hurt, Percival Nyne will die to-night."

Giles answered nothing. His eyes were on John. As he had expected, at the first movement on their part in the direction of the corner where Nyne and the rest now stood, the crowd closed in against them, shoulder to shoulder, in one solid mass.

"Vamos," John said again, louder, and this time he did not turn, but as he spoke grasped the shoulders of two men in front of him, twisted them apart, and thrust himself in

between. Instantly Giles followed, Dick at his side, and forming a wedge of three, they began to drive a way through the struggling crowd.

It was a bitter fight, none the less intense because there was no outward show of violence in it; Nyne had given the most precise instructions on that point. It was no part of his policy to cause a disturbance which would bring in the police until such time as his object had been won, and a rescue was too late.

He wished these men to feel their powerlessness against him, and to exhaust themselves. He had a way to deal with them afterwards, whether they failed or succeeded.

There are few obstacles more difficult to overcome than a stubbornly opposing crowd, but ways and means may be found by the experienced.

John and Dick, as old footballers, were past masters in the gentle art of "hustling," and Giles, after twenty-five years' hard service in the police, knew the weak points of a crush as he knew his alphabet.

On they went, with a steady, relentless persistence, crushing tender toes in all directions, bruising stout men in soft places, and nearly annihilating thin ones. Relton men are not tall or powerful individually; none had a chance against such men as John and Giles, and they won through.

Percival Nyne, who was exchanging greetings with acquaintances, and supplying Tom Symes with particularly choice whiskey, now saw that the second part of his programme would be reached sooner than he had expected. He was not, however, much disturbed. The very success of the enemy would make their ultimate discomfiture the more certain and overwhelming. The lads of the Nile were not taking their hustling happily, and while for the moment they were overmastered by the strength and size of their opponents, they only needed an opportunity to fly at their throats like a pack of wolves, and once down, God help them!

"The fools!" Nyne muttered, rubbing his thin hands contentedly, "they're digging their own graves."

Nyne's only anxiety was Tom Symes. They had spent

the afternoon together, and the prize-fighter's mind had been reduced to pulp by his landlord's arguments and threats, and he had effusively promised moral and physical support this evening. But now, the stir of the crowd, the swift approach of Giles and his friends in spite of all opposition, coupled with the rising irritation of the hustled Reltonites, was acting upon him like strong wine. So far, however, he had kept his back turned towards his former friends, and talked loudly to Ben Kipley.

The crisis was approaching fast. John's progress had been materially aided by Ted Tippetts, who had edged his way to the middle of the bar, and at the right moment had protested violently against the crush about him, and declaring that he "weren't no lobster to be boiled and potted alive-oh," used his broad shoulders with such effect, that the wedge of three advanced three yards in as many seconds.

A few moments more, and John would be within reach of his man. But now the crowd, seeing itself beaten, became suddenly dangerous. Fists were clenched and shaken, threats were freely showered in John's face, and the first blow given would be the signal for a general attack.

"Hold hard," Giles whispered in his ear, "I'll settle 'em."

John obeyed, and moved aside, and Giles, taking one last mighty stride forward, burst into a great laugh, and addressed Tom Symes in a voice heard in the street outside.

"Hello, there, you eighty-one-tonner! Are you lost, stolen, or strayed that you forget your friends? Here's Mr. Glynn, from Ameriky, who has come all across the ocean to meet ye, and you won't look at him!"

Giles's attack was well planned. Tom Symes cast down on the counter the glass that was in his hand with such force that he smashed it, and turned short round, his face fiery red. A heave of his great shoulders brought him forward two paces in John's direction, and the crowd fell quietly back.

"As I'm alive," he said, in a hoarse voice, "if it ain't

Giles! I never saw ye, man. Mr. Glynn, how are you to-night?" He shook hands, with a great show of heartiness, but his fingers were cold, and he did not meet John's eye.

"Why, we're in grand fettle," Giles answered cheerily, in a voice that echoed round the room, which had now grown ominously still.

"My word, ain't that the guv'nor? I thought I could not be mistaken. Now that is what I calls luck. I would not have Mr. Glynn go back to New York without being able to say he'd met the King of the Nile. Will you introduce him, or shall I?"

At this fresh move, Tom grew redder in the face than ever. But he was as wax in the hands of Giles.

"I will," he replied, in a sepulchral tone. "Guv'nor," he said gruffly, while the Nile—as Giles had reckoned upon—pricked up its ears to listen, "this here is the gentleman you knows of. He came to me with an introduction from John D. Sullivan, the American champion. He's a member"—here Tom raised his voice—"of the P. R. of New York, and he particularly wishes to make your acquaintance."

Thus Tom Symes. Nyne might well be anxious. Slowly but certainly the weather-cock was turning round.

As for the men of the Nile, to whom John Sullivan was perhaps the one man not an Englishman worthy, in their opinion, of respect—though we are very patriotic in the Nile—they now strained eyes and ears to the utmost to ascertain what the guv'nor would do in these new circumstances.

He raised his hat, and stared calmly into John's face with his expressionless eyes, with a certain dignity. But he felt a cold, premonitory shiver down his back. Others saw a variety of qualities in John's face: Nyne saw nothing but hard inflexibility.

"You will take something, sir?" he said softly, beckoning to the barman. "Bill, my special, please."

"Thanks," John answered quietly, "I am not drinking to-night."

He looked steadily back into Nyne's round death's head

for a moment, and then, passing it by, confronted Ben Kipley and caught Joe by the arm.

"You and I have met before," he said, in a voice loud enough to be heard by all about them, "but you don't recognise me. What is the matter?"

He shook the arm he held, and pressed his fingers into the muscle just above the elbow, with a force which left a red mark there for a week afterwards.

Joe quivered all over, gave a deep sigh, and then, to the astonishment of Ben Kipley, responded in a thick, tremulous voice:

"They've give me something," he said. "Let me be, and save yourself."

John's face flushed scarlet, and he turned swiftly and sought the eye of Tom Symes.

But the prize-fighter's back was toward him, and Nyne's hand was on Tom's arm holding it.

At that moment a voice close by shouted harshly:

"Rats! Rats in the house. Mugs of the perlice. Break 'em up. Yah—h!"

This cry was echoed from all parts of the room, until it rose to a savage yell; but not before John had recognised the first voice to be Tim Venner's, and had found where it came from.

Tim now made a sad mistake. Commissioned by Nyne to give the signal for an assault the moment Joe was interfered with, he had no sooner done so than he made a vicious attack upon Joe himself, aiming a blow at the back of his rival's head. In a moment John was upon him, and preventing Joe from falling with one hand, struck the wretched coster a swift blow between the eyes. John did not put his full strength into the blow, or Tim would never have breathed again. As it was, he fell, bleeding profusely, and was carried away by two friends to the hospital. The bridge of his nose was afterwards set by a student with moderate success; but he was never able to see distinctly with one eye again.

Pandemonium now reigned in the beer-house; every man

pressed forward to the bar, and yelled bloodthirsty threats. Still, for an instant, those in the front rank hesitated. The magic words "the New York P. R.," and the swiftness of Tim Venner's collapse, held the boldest of them in check. But this could not last.

"You Tom," Giles cried, seizing the prize-fighter's arm, "now's your time."

But Tom jerked away.

"Get out of it yourself," he snarled.

The crowd saw the movement, and howled its delight, upon which Giles, after searching in vain for John's groom, closed his great fists with a fierce snort, to fight while he could stand.

A word now came to him from John himself.

"I'll hold them," he said. "Let drive, and give me room."

His voice was quite quiet and cheerful, to Giles's intense surprise. But he hastened to obey, and thrusting his great weight on the pressing crowd, drove his fists in their faces, his example followed by Dick and Ted Tippetts with a will.

As an immediate result, the space was cleared before the bar, and Percival Nyne, who had quietly shrunk back into a convenient corner out of harm's way, was isolated for a moment from his friends. It could be but for a moment, then the crowd would surge back on the charge, its leaders savage with pain, and irresistible by sheer force of numbers. But in that moment something remarkable happened. With a panther-like spring, John leaped on the counter behind Nyne, smashing bottles and glasses wholesale, the barmen flying before him; then, stooping, he caught hold of Nyne by the neck and waist, and drawing him up beside him, held him out at arm's length for all the Nile to see.

A yell of astonishment, followed by a sudden lull, as John, easily holding his writhing captive in one hand, threw up the other for silence.

"Gentlemen," he said, in a voice perfectly quiet, but reaching every ear in the room, "if you wish this man to be

killed, you will come on. If not, listen to what I have to say."

A threatening yell answered him, and a voice:

"You'll not leave 'ere, mister; don't think it."

"I do not," John rejoined, drawing Nyne in front of him, and pressing his thumb upon a particularly tender spot in his windpipe. "Speak to them," he said in a whisper, "or I'll throttle you."

The wretched creature grimaced and wriggled in John's hands like a monkey in the grip of a bear.

"Keep back!" he screamed. "Keep back! Hear what he has to say."

John removed his thumb, and held his victim again at arm's length, while, at Nyne's appeal, the crowd remained still.

"Thank you," John said, with smooth politeness. "I only want a hearing. Gentlemen, some of you said just now that I came from the police. That was a lie. Look round, and tell me if there is one 'tec in this room." He paused, and some of the crowd growled a grudging negative. "No; I have come with these friends to meet you and to do two things. One was to face this man," shaking Nyne until his teeth chattered in his head, "and having faced him, show him, and you, that I am no more afraid of so poor a scoundrel than of Tim Venner, there." He pointed to the door, through which the prostrate coster was being borne at this moment.

"That is one thing. The other will interest you more. I have come from America, though I am not an American. I am a bit of a boxer, though not a member of the P. R., and I will now, with your leave, challenge Tom Symes, the best fighting man in the Nile, to take me on, without gloves, in your presence to-night."

He paused again, and the room was very still, the men staring at him, gaping with astonishment. It was the moment in which everything might be lost or won. John saw this, and staked all. Thrusting Nyne away upon a heap of broken glass, as if he were a bundle of old clothes, he

sprung from the counter, and marching up to the prize-fighter, struck his great chest a friendly, but significant, blow.

"The Nile is willing, Tom," he said, in a friendly tone. "Are you?"

The eighty-one-tonner drew himself up to his full height.

"Willing to fight you?" he shouted, in a voice of thunder, "aye, a dozen of ye, and with my left hand!"

A cry of approval, a shout of delight, and then a tumultuous cheer. The Nile was won—for the time.

CHAPTER XXII

KNOCKED OUT

"THE GRAPES," in outward appearance, was small and mean. There were no great plate-glass windows, no elaborate candelabra of incandescent gas. But this modesty was deceptive. At the back of the premises there was a spacious saloon carefully fitted up for boxing purposes, and capable of holding a hundred onlookers and more. It was one of the best-known places for "competitions" of a quiet, serious kind in London, more "business" in one night being done here than by the "George" in a week. "The Grapes," indeed, was the *rendezvous* on occasion for all the fighting men of the first rank in town. It must be understood, however, that these gentlemen had nothing to do with the seamy side of the place. They entered by a private door, and conducted their business soberly and in order. If the criminal element were not altogether absent from these gatherings, it was their misfortune, they said, not their fault. Their object was to encourage the noble art of self-defence, and it was no business of theirs if a boxer were not altogether "square" in private life. It was undoubtedly true that no connection necessarily existed between a boxer and a "gun." At the same time, it was a curious coincidence that, comparing one neighbourhood with another, no district in London produced so many boxers in proportion to its population as the Nile.

This fact was known to John, hence the present plan. The effect of the challenge of Tom Symes surpassed his most sanguine hopes. Everything else seemed forgotten now. Nyne, with shattered nerves and much-displaced clothing, might wander about among the lads and mutter and threaten

at will. He was not listened to, and where in a few instances he received any answer to his plaint, it was a rough rejoinder that if the Yankee were Satan himself it was of no consequence until he had fought Tom Symes.

So, brushed aside, his reign in the Nile over for the time, the "guv'nor" was fain to fall in as best he might with the humour of the moment and follow the panting, eager crowd now pouring upstairs to see the fight—a fight such as had never been before, the eighty-one-tonner himself doing battle for the honour of the Nile.

On the other side, Giles held a whispered consultation with John, who thereupon marched off, arm-in-arm with Tom Symes, cheered lustily by the crowd, while Giles turned upon Ben Kipley, still keeping his hold upon Joe.

"Ben, boy," Giles said in the most friendly tone, "hand him over to me."

Ben winked his sharp eyes and glanced round for Nyne, while Giles's heavy hand came down upon his shoulder.

"All right, Mr. Giles," he said. "But, look 'ere, say as you had to throw me about a bit first, will you? The guv'nor will be like a mad weasel after this is over, and will be sure to blame it on to me, and he do hold me so tight."

"Very good," Giles answered. "I will. But take my tip and mizzle out of this."

Ben grinned.

"What! Miss seeing Tom give your bloke 'ome, sweet 'ome; not me. I'd swing first."

And so saying the little man dived into the crowd and disappeared, coming to the surface later in the front row of the boxing-room.

Giles, with Ted Tippetts and his brother to help him, now hurried Joe into the street. There they met a detective.

"What luck, then?" he said.

Giles gave him the news, with a sharp warning at the end.

"Mind, when you make your report, you'll say fight *with* gloves. You understand that, Jim?"

The policeman winked sympathetically, then sighed,

"If I were to get in at the back now, very quiet, to see it—eh?—I'll promise not to know any of 'em."

Giles snorted contemptuously.

"You? They'd pull you in pieces and throw the bits out of window. You've never seen such a crowd, my boy, as we have got in there."

But there was no time now to waste gossiping.

Joe was put in charge of the elder Tippetts to be conveyed to Hampstead in a hansom, and Giles hurried back to "The Grapes."

The boxing-room was packed from floor to ceiling, and Giles would have been unable to get in if he had not known of the private door.

The seats were in tiers as at a circus, the "ring" at the bottom, in the centre.

All was ready, and the men stripped. Tom's backers were folding up his clothes. John, Dick beside him, was waiting for Giles.

Giles himself was trembling with excitement; his face, albeit a trifle anxious, beaming like some rugged cherub's.

"You were ready for this, then?" he said, feeling John's singlet, which was of the thinnest material, and chuckling as John drew from his coat-pocket a pair of shoes with india-rubber soles. "My word, you have everything complete, sir. How d'ye feel now?"

John laughed contentedly.

"Fresh as paint and skittish as a colt, Giles. I held trumps, you see, after all."

Giles opened his mouth to give a cordial assent, but something made him pause—the sight of Tom Symes.

Big and burly as the prize-fighter looked at ordinary times, now, as he stood stripped and ready, stroking the muscles of his great arms and cracking jokes with the time-keeper—a hard-bitten old "sport" in a green cut-away, with a face like a bull-terrier's—he appeared truly enormous.

"He's a terrible size," the old agent answered with a gulp. "But there's one thing: if you are queered Tom should be

man enough to see us out safe, whatever the guv nor may try to do."

John turned away with a shrug.

"Dick, boy, how goes it now?"

But Dick's face was more hopeless than Giles's.

"If I had known this was coming," he said between his teeth, "I should have brought my six-shooter and chanced it. He'll kill you."

John's lip curled.

"Boy Brabant, have you no more nerve than this? Pshaw, man, think of Evelyn and what it means to her if we take the Nile. We are in England, and must do as the English do. I have no fears at all. Ready!"

The old time-keeper had glanced at him inquiringly. At the answer he stepped backward with a nod. The seconds left the ring, and John and the eighty-one-tonner faced one another alone.

Up to this moment the crowd had been chattering and making bets among themselves. Now the voices died away, and upon the packed room fell the stillness of death.

A sharp cheer like a thunder clap. The men had shaken hands. Then the silence again, deep and intense.

"Ah!"

The ejaculation came from Giles. The men had closed. John, with a supple, cat-like spring had "come in" upon Tom's face with both hands. The blows made the big man sneeze; but he countered with a force that would have broken a beam, only to find his opponent out of reach. An instant of suspense, and then John attacked again, this time "propping" the giant sharply in the bread-basket with his left and cutting him between the third and fourth ribs with his right, getting away unscathed a second time.

Tom snorted like a steam-engine pulled up in mid-career, while the crowd grumbled.

"Why don't you give it 'im, Tom?" yelled a shrill voice. "Snaffle 'is jaw, old cock, or he'll get a curb on yours."

Tom fumed at this gibe, and then pulled himself together with an ugly gleam in his eyes.

Giles sighed and shook his head.

"He's begun hitting too soon," he said to Dick. "He should have winded him first. Now Tom will slog him to rights."

It seemed probable. The prize-fighter was obviously roused to the utmost, and bore down on his foe like a bull on the charge—a bull with open eyes.

Giles grew sick as the blows came in; for John, instead of leaping aside, met them squarely in the centre of the ring. Yet such was his quickness and address that though the great fists struck with hammer-like force, his face was untouched, and he delivered a tremendous counter blow upon Tom which closed one eye and bruised him to the bone. Then the return came. Maddened with the pain, Tom let go with both hands, and John, taken on the chest and forehead, was hurled backwards on his head. Thus ended the first round, and Tom, with his nose in the air, walked majestically back to his seconds, amid tumultuous cheers from the crowd.

But the little time-keeper, an old friend of his, rubbed his nose uneasily and shook his head.

John, for his part, picked himself up without difficulty, and lay back in his chair while Giles went scientifically to work upon him with a damp towel.

The old man could scarcely speak, he was so anxious; but he managed to gasp out, "How d'ye feel, sir?" in a hoarse whisper.

John smiled as placidly as an infant.

"Prime. That was what I needed, dear old eighty-one."

"Time!"

At the word the men rose and stepped forward, and the room again was still.

The faces of the fighters had changed. The easy air of superiority in that of Tom Symes had gone. He was grimly watchful. While John's, though calm as ever, seemed to have grown older suddenly; there was a grey hardness in his eyes, his mouth and jaw were rigid.

They were more cautious, too, each having tasted of the other's strength. Yet those who had keen eyes saw that

the smaller man was edging up, the big one holding himself in and waiting for attack.

Inch by inch John crept in to get his distance, swinging on tip-toe to right, to left, as a bull-dog before he pins the bull. Inch by inch like a rising tide, now back, now forwards until he had reached the point he was aiming at. Then in he came. Not, this time, with a spring, but easily, almost lazily, as it seemed, as if courting a blow. Tom struck at him and put his shoulder in the lunge, but he struck empty air, for John had "slipped," retaliating with a crushing counter on the mouth. Tom gave a grunt of pain and let his right hand go, striking John full in the chest for the third time, but not to fell him. As a hammer strikes an anvil and slides off, so from his opponent's chest, braced as it was to meet the stroke, Tom's hand slipped aside. His guard was down, and John's time had come. He had been gathering himself together, and now crashed in three blows, behind which was every ounce of his weight, full thirteen stone.

The first, and Tom's right eyelid drooped; the next, his mouth was full of blood; the third, which struck him behind the ear, and he staggered, hit aimlessly into air, and then charged madly forward with open hands to seize his enemy round the waist and throw him. But this was anticipated. John leaped aside, and then delivered one last blow upon the big man's weakest place under the arm-pit, over the ribs. With a groan and sharp whistling breath Tom threw up his arms, heeled over, and fell bodily upon the ropes.

The round was over, and John walked back to Giles a little dizzily, for he was much exhausted, and the pain of his bruised chest as he breathed was excruciating. But outward, he seemed unhurt, while Tom was dragged from the ropes almost insensible.

Giles was shaking all over.

"Wonderful, wonderful," he panted. "Lord, but you've nigh killed him."

John shook his head without speaking, while Giles sponged his chest vigorously.

"I say that you have," the old man reiterated. "The only thing is, what's to happen now? Wild cats won't be in it with the Nile. We should have thought of this."

"I have," John said.

"Time!"

He rose, shook himself, and went quietly forward to the centre of the ring. Tom was there to meet him. It had been hard work for his seconds, though, and they had been obliged to administer brandy. But he was there, grim, resolute; game to the end.

Yet he was a woeful spectacle, and the heart of the Nile sank low. His mouth was all awry, his chin looked as if he had a severe attack of the mumps; one eye was hermetically sealed, and the other, though it winked feebly at John, was clearly of the very smallest use.

And now a new feature entered into the scene, the darkest and, alas for "fair-play Britain," not an uncommon feature in such affairs as these. The crowd of onlookers were no longer peaceably sitting on their chairs, but were upon their feet, pressing towards the ring, the first rank hard upon the ropes, while among them, threading his way sinuously like a spider weaving a web, moved Percival Nyne, whispering counsel and encouragement. His opportunity had come again sooner than might have been expected, and Giles, whose sharp eye nothing escaped, groaned and gnashed his teeth.

But there was no time to warn John. He was already in the ring, and had there been opportunity, what warning could be given?

So the fighters met again for the third time, and the Nile waited, murmuring.

John came up and, circling round Tom, narrowly observed his condition without appearing to do so.

Tom's nerves could not endure this strain. He charged, at which John sprang aside, doubled under his hands, and appeared at the other side of the ring. This was repeated twice. It required much skill, for Tom was raging. The little breath he had left was nearly gone. In a few minutes

he would be as helpless as a child. But this was not to be. At the close of the second turn, which had resulted in John receiving a severe blow on the shoulder which spun him round like a top, and but for his excellent balance would have overturned him, he sprang suddenly back to the edge of the ring, and then, with a laugh, came forward holding out both hands.

"How's that for a finish?" he cried. "I have had enough. You are best man, Tom Symes."

A breathless whistle of astonishment from the crowd, a cheer from a few, then Percival Nyne's voice, clear, cold, and biting.

"You land him one, Tom, then leave him to settle with us. He's afraid of the Nile."

Nyne's appeal took instant effect. Tom, who at John's words had stood speechless, hardly believing his ears, started, and turned round.

"Afraid?" he roared. "Afraid of them he faced alone, with you in his hands a wriggling worm. Afraid? No, you damned liar. The man who has beat the eighty-one-tonner back on the ropes ain't afraid of the Nile. Mr. Glynn, shake hands."

He gripped John's fingers in both of his great paws and wrung them hard. Then he turned round, his arm locked in his old antagonist's, shoulder to shoulder.

"Lads all," he cried, "you listen to me. I've been in the Nile twenty year before you ever saw the guv'nor. Now, which will you have, me or him? He's my enemy, 'cos he's the enemy of my friend here. Now choose which way you please, but choose now, and those on my side show it by giving three cheers for the best man who's ever come to the Nile—John Glynn. Now then, who's for us—Hip, hip, hip!"

A crowd of men at a high state of nervous tension is the most combustible thing in the world. A spark one way or the other will rouse it to frenzy and dissolve it to laughter and cheers. Tom's appeal was irresistible. No one hesitated—no one thought of it. With one ecstatic shout they

followed his lead and cheered, and cheered again, until they were faint and hoarse.

"It's over," Tom whispered, leaning heavily on John's shoulder, for he was nearly spent. "I kep' my word to you after all. Lord, but I feel terribly groggy in the 'ead."

"I did not intend to hit so hard," John said, "but you were too strong for me."

The prize-fighter chuckled at the implied compliment.

"No, no," he wheezed. "You had me. Yet you held back. I'll not forget that, mister, to my dyin' day."

CHAPTER XXIII

CHAMPION

TOM SYMES'S shop opened at eight o'clock in the morning. It was an early hour for a tradesman to begin business in Relton, but a considerable amount of Tom's custom was naturally connected with the breakfast tables of Crisp Street and the immediate neighbourhood, and the working women of these parts give their children their morning meal at half-past eight, to get them off in time for school, except where free breakfasts are provided at the schools. Then the mothers stay in bed till nine, or even ten.

On the morning after the great fight at "The Grapes," early folks had to go elsewhere for the ha'porths of skim milk, the farthing pats of butter, and the eggs which were labelled "fresh." The doors of No. 18 were not opened till half-past nine.

At that hour Mrs. Symes appeared, in a much-creased print gown, with a shawl pinned about her shoulders, to conceal deficiencies in the upper regions. Her face was pinched, her eyes weary with lack of sleep, her temper was of the shortest.

It was an inopportune moment for any one to call, and when the girl who "did for" Mrs. Symes in the way of rough cleaning saw a woman of slovenly appearance address her mistress, with the obvious intention of entering the shop to talk, she retreated hastily into the parlour behind out of harm's way.

But Susannah was disappointed. Mrs. Symes, after a comprehensive glance, nodded curtly in greeting to the visitor, and addressed her in as amiable a tone as her harsh voice could compass.

"Why, thank you kindly, Mrs. Prickett, I'm a treat. But you look poorly-like. Won't you come in?"

Then, placing a chair invitingly, she shut the shop door after her, and went behind the counter.

This invitation was exactly what Mrs. Prickett wanted, and she hastened to take advantage of the chair. She looked poorly in more ways than one. Her face was grey and flabby, her bonnet crumpled and forlorn, her cloak awry, her dress dirty and stained, her boots down at the heel behind and unlaced in front. The woman was obviously just recovering from a heavy drinking bout, and from the tremulousness of her hands and lips, and a peculiar watery appearance of her eyes, even a person much less experienced that Mrs. Symes could have seen that the effect of what she had been taking had not wholly passed away.

"I am very poorly, my dear," she said, wiping her eyes. "I ain't recovered the loss of my little Amy"—here she sniffed. "Not as I blames you for taking her in; not at all, not at all." And she shook her fat head with the air of a Christian martyr.

"Then you want her back?" Mrs. Symes said. "That's what you have come here for. Don't fear to say it straight. What was done was done spite of all I could say or do. I have had something to put up with, I can tell you."

Here she nodded significantly. Mrs. Prickett's small eyes became suddenly smaller, and she lowered her voice.

"Have you, my dear? Well, you ain't the only one. What I've gone through"—she wept in earnest now—"from *him* since, no one 'ud ever believe."

"Him?" Mrs. Symes said, with a bewildered expression. "Do you mean that feller who took her, John Glynn?"

"No, I don't," the other said shortly. "He, indeed! I mean the guv'nor, of course."

Then she lowered her voice to a whining whisper, at which Mrs. Symes, puttting her finger to her lips, went to the door behind the shop and ordered Susannah to go to Amy's room and stay there till she was sent for.

"Oh, it's the guv'nor who has sent you here, is it?" she

said in a tone of innocent surprise. "What's he been doing to you? I thought you was his trusted friend."

Mrs. Prickett bridled, with as much dignity as her appearance permitted.

"There's not anything he don't trust me with. Why, it was only this morning he says—but I must not tell secrets." She chuckled with tipsy cunning. "Oh, my dear, he is hard on me just now. Every time I sees him he says, 'Amy come back?' and when I sez 'No,' he shows his teeth—you know them teeth"—she shuddered—"and says, 'Why not?' and when I says I don't know, he snaps at me like a dog biting, and says, 'then go and find out.' That's why I came now, just as you thought, and I hopes you'll be able to tell me. For indeed, Mrs. Symes, my dear"—and now her eyes became cunning again—"if Amy don't come back soon, something will happen to you and yours. You knows the guv'nor."

Mrs. Symes nodded.

"He is wonderful fond of Amy. Pity she can't abide him, or you. But she can't, and she'll never come back."

Mrs. Prickett stiffened like an angry cat, and then fell into a maudlin snuffle.

"It's all along of them interfering Organisation people. We was going on so comfortable. Young Joe doing just as he were told. He got his money an' all. Five pounds of it I saw with my own eyes. That would have set up Amy to rights. And the guv'nor never would have let Joe want; he told me so. Now if Amy don't come back to me, and bring Joe with her, we'll all be ruined together," and she wept copiously.

"That's hard," Mrs. Symes said sympathetically, while her eyes narrowed. "But the guv'nor may only be lying to you, after all."

Mrs. Prickett stiffened again, and this time her mood changed altogether.

"I'll have you know that the guv'nor treats me, humble as I am, as a friend," she cried with asperity. "He never lies to me."

"Then you ought to be all right, as his friend."

"Who said I was not?" she snapped. "It's Amy I am thinking of. I've got to get her back, and I will, too!"

Her tone became threatening.

"Well, well," Mrs. Symes said soothingly, "if I can manage it, you shall. But she won't see you. Tell me what I am to say to persuade her. I'll repeat anything you please."

Mrs. Prickett softened.

"Now, that is friendly, my dear. I'll tell you all about it. At seven of the clock this morning the guv'nor sends for me. You know what happened last night. I did not, then, and the look of him, with his face white as plaster, and his neck all bandages, gave me a rare turn. But he was hisself. 'Go to 18,' he sez, 'and find out if that girl is coming back, and say I sent you. If she ain't coming, let me know.' I asks him, my dear, what he'd do if Amy did not come. He smiles at that. 'Oh, I shall wait,' he sez, 'a month, or more. I'm very patient. When I have waited long enough, I shall pay 'em, Sarah, pay 'em, my good woman, every penny back.' There was a lot more, and you tell Amy if she'd seen his smile she'd come running. If she don't——" The old woman made a face more expressive than words.

Mrs. Symes nodded absently. She was gazing out of the shop window down the street, and at this moment caught sight of some one crossing the road, obviously coming in, and further away another person whom she knew, walking fast in the same direction.

"I'll tell her," she said, "that you say if she don't go back to you, and take her Joe from that man who has him now, she or Joe will be queered by the guv'nor."

"Both," cried Mrs. Prickett. "He'll have 'em both; and as for that Organisation lady—woman I call her—I can't think of her name——"

"Grey—Miss Grey," Mrs. Symes said encouragingly, watching the door. "Ah! and what's to happen to her?"

But Mrs. Prickett suddenly paused.

"That's another pair of shoes, my dear. It don't do to say too much, even to a friend."

The latch of the door was now smartly raised, and Mrs. Prickett, turning nervously round, found herself face to face with the very person she had in her mind. She rose and bobbed a cringing curtsey.

"A good mornin' to ye, miss," she whined. "Hope you are very well to-day."

But Evelyn only noticed her greeting by the coldest inclination of the head. She went straight to the counter.

"How do you do, Mrs. Symes? I came to inquire after Amy on my way to the office. May I see her?"

Mrs. Symes glanced at the clock. It was half-past nine, and Miss Grey's office opened, she believed, at eleven. She drew conclusions.

"Amy's fust-rate, and would like to see you, I know," she said, eyeing Evelyn almost as narrowly as she had scrutinised Mrs. Prickett. "But it's full early. If you will wait here, though, I'll see that she gets ready. She would not like you to come to find things in a muddle."

This was Mrs. Symes's little way of leaving Evelyn alone with Mrs. Prickett. There is a certain stage of inebriety, especially when the victim is recovering from a debauch, when intense irritability sets in. Mrs. Prickett was in that stage now, and the contempt with which her greeting had been met by the Organisation lady filled her soul with furious, unbridled rage, all of which the acute Mrs. Symes had perceived. She wished, above all things, that Mrs. Prickett's temper should be tried to breaking point.

Mrs. Prickett rose slowly from her chair.

"I said good-morning to you, miss," she remarked hoarsely. "You didn't hear me, p'r'aps."

Evelyn, who was impatiently tapping the counter with her umbrella, her thoughts far from Mrs. Prickett, turned round.

"I heard you," she said. "What do you want?"

Her manner added fuel to the fire.

"My stars!" Mrs. Prickett exclaimed thickly, her face

purple with passion. "How proud we are. How 'aughty and 'igh! and all because our young man went and broke the face of a fat-headed fighting man last night, and ill-used shameful a gentleman he ain't fit to look at. But there'll be another look on you soon—a pitiful, whining look—ho, ho, ho! When your gentleman comes home head first on a stretcher, how'll you feel then? Yah!" She snapped her fingers in Evelyn's face, unconscious that the shop door had opened again, and that a man stood behind her. "And when that happens, dear," she went on, "look out for yourself. He's a-going to teach you a lesson, pretty, is some one I know, which will spoil your looks. He'll pay you full and true for all the trouble you have brought on him."

She lurched nearer still, with so menacing a scowl that Evelyn shrank back. Instantly Mrs. Prickett felt a hand grasp her shoulder with a firmness which allowed of no dispute, while a voice she did not know said quietly:

"Shall I tell Mr. Nyne what you say?"

Mrs. Prickett jumped, with a shriek like a stricken rabbit, and when she saw that it was John Glynn himself who spoke, she fell back against the wall with a face so contorted with fright that they thought she was going to have a fit. She did not utter a sound, however, and when John, fearing she would fall and hurt herself, held out a hand to support her, she sprang away with astonishing agility for so large a woman, and with another sob of abject fear, made a dash for the door, and fled.

At the same moment Mrs. Symes, who all the time had been within hearing, though out of sight, returned to the counter, and laughed with grim complacency.

"I timed that bit rather well," she said. "I saw you both, and thought to myself that the old cat would have just time to spit out her spite against you, miss, for our gentleman to hear. Ain't she nice and vicious, and her master too?"

"She is abominably tipsy," Evelyn said in a disgusted tone.

"Therefore, mark her words, and don't forget 'em," Mrs.

Symes rejoined sententiously. "Mrs. Prickett never tells the truth unless she's three parts gone, then she never lies. I warned you what I thought the guv'nor would have laid up for you. Now, take my word for it, you *know*."

But Mrs. Symes's words, though remembered afterwards, did not impress Evelyn at this moment. She was attentively studying the appearance of Mr. Glynn.

"You had to fight, then, after all; and you have been badly hurt."

Her eyes dwelt as she spoke upon a severe bruise on his forehead, a scar over one eyebrow, and the middle fingers of both hands, which were in bandages.

John blushed violently. This, before Tom Symes's wife. Of all unseasonable remarks it was the worst he had ever heard; and before he could reply Mrs. Symes had taken the situation into her own hands.

"So we know what your business is now," she said, with arms akimbo. "Well, I never did! Don't you ask after my husband!" she added loftily. "He's in bed, and will be for a week; while you—a scrape or two on the head, a touch on the chin, and the skin off your knuckles. And that's all. Well, we knows what you are, and that's something. And now, perhaps, having had your little joke, you'll tell us your right name. Will you?"

John looked puzzled at this attack. Then a light broke upon him.

"My name is the same as my father's," he said politely; "Glynn, and I have proof, in writing, that I was christened John."

"You tell that to the crows," cried Mrs. Symes. "The name of the new champion from America who, as we hear now, has beat John D. Sullivan himself, and has come over to take the International Belt, ain't that any more than my tom cat."

"Possibly not," John answered coolly. "But it is mine. Come, I see how it is. You have been fooled. I will tell you what I am, and you may tell the Nile. I was born in Yorkshire, and left home upon the death of my father, who

was a clergyman, and went to America when I was twenty. That is ten years ago. I have lived since then in the Western States. Now I have come home, to stay. I fought your husband in order to make friends with him and the Nile. I held my own because I have been taught by the best fighting men in New York, and because I am in training, and Tom is out of gear. Now, tell me, and before Miss Grey, do you believe what I say, or are you still gulled by the stories of Percival Nyne?"

Mrs. Symes dropped two milk cans with an emphatic clash upon the counter.

"I believe you. I must when you speak that way. I am not a looney, and you're a gentleman, for all your American way of talking. But I was shook for a moment, and it do seem a miracle now that any but a pro., and the best at that, should down my Tom. But that's because I'm his wife. Yet it is queer to think why you should face the biggest man in the ring, who might have killed you. But, Lord!"—here she caught sight of Evelyn's face, and a smile of intelligence smoothed away the perplexity in her own—"how my tongue do run. Miss Grey don't want to hear about fights and fighting men. I had forgotten she was here at all."

Evelyn smiled, too, blissfully unconscious of what Mrs. Symes was thinking just then.

"I want to hear a great deal about this particular fight. But I shall make Mr. Glynn tell me another time. May I see Amy now?"

"Why, of course. Come along, both of ye." Mrs. Symes spoke with a cordiality upon which John looked with vague suspicion. "She wants to know all about her Joe, does Amy. Follow me; she'll be all ready now."

Nevertheless, when they reached Amy's room she went on first for a moment. When she returned she threw the door open with a flourish.

"There's some one else to see you besides Miss Grey," she cried, as John passed in. "The champion fighting man of the Nile."

Then she closed the door and went away laughing. It

was her revenge upon the man who, however fairly, had had the unpardonable impertinence to beat her husband.

In John's estimation it was a very malicious and complete form of vengeance. If there had been one thing he wished to avoid, as Mrs. Symes had shrewdly suspected, it was that Evelyn should hear such nonsense as this until after she had received from him such a version of the affair as would enable her to see it in its true light. But now everything was hopelessly entangled by the glamour of this wretched sparring match.

Amy, who was sitting by the fire, wrapped in a dressing gown of Evelyn's, and looking very pretty and interesting after her illness, sprang up and clapped her hands at Mrs. Symes's announcement.

"Champion of the Nile! Oh, that is a rare name for you, sir. And it is a true name, ain't it, Miss Grey? And they will call him that, after last night, in every street and court round here. There is not one of them in this place thought a man lived who weren't afraid of Mr. Nyne, or who could stand up to the eighty-one-tonner. And here's our Mr. Glynn just shakes the guv'nor like a rat, and nigh twists the breath out of him, they say; and then finishes up by having a match with big Tom, and sending him over the ropes second round. The like of this has never been seen, or dreamed of, and it will never be forgotten, never! Oh, Miss Grey, would you not have given both your ears to have been there and watched it done. I would, and my eyes as well."

Excitement and enthusiasm are infectious, when they are genuine and spontaneous; and Evelyn, who had hitherto detested all fighting with fists as vulgar and violent, except as a form of physical exercise for youths at college, found herself suddenly thrilled by Amy's ardour, and though she did not admit it, did wish she could have been there to see.

John, on the contrary, was thoroughly disgusted.

"You have heard a very one-sided account of the affair," he said, in his curtest tone, addressing Evelyn: "The truth of the matter is simply this: Nyne had, as we expected, collected a very unpleasant crowd at 'The Grapes.' At all

costs the men had to be interested, impressed somehow, and amused. Thanks entirely to Mr. Brabant and Giles, who, at much risk, by hard fighting, brought me within reach of Nyne himself, I was able to make the man look a fool. Thanks, moreover, to Giles's acquaintance with the place and its owner, we were able to arrange a friendly boxing match, Mr. Symes and I. Last of all, Symes himself, most unexpectedly, and with the best of pluck, defied Nyne to his face, and shook hands with me before the crowd. That is all. We have succeeded fairly. But, please understand that is due to Mr. Brabant and Giles, and only incidentally to rough and tumble experiences of my own out West."

"I see," Evelyn said, with eyes that were dancing with an amusement and mischief which John did not at all relish. "Thank you so much. I wonder whether Giles and Mr. Brabant will corroborate. I must hear what they say first."

"And when you do hear, miss," Amy exclaimed, "I hope you will come to me. By that time I shall have heard a lot as well. But, Mr. Glynn, will you tell me of Joe? No one seems rightly to be sure what's become of him, though I do know what you did to that Tim Venner. Unless, p'r'aps," with a giggle, "it was, after all, the other gentleman who sent him to hospital for hitting my Joe in the back."

John was able to give a satisfactory account of Joe, and having done so, suggested pointedly to Evelyn that it was time to go to the office.

"I have some business to discuss with you," he said. "And Giles will not be there till noon. Besides, it is committee day."

The last words brought Evelyn to her feet, though for reasons of her own she would have liked to stay with Amy.

"We must go; but what is that extraordinary sound?"

They all listened, and Amy clapped her hands.

"It's the same as I heard last night when Mr. Glynn and the eighty-one shook hands in the street. It's the lads; they've heard that he's in here, and they are going to tell him just what they think of him. Now you'll see."

Amy was right. Outside No. 18 Crisp Street there was

a small crowd of people—men, women, and small boys—who were obviously waiting for some one to come out, and were beguiling their time by whistles, cat-calls, and chaff.

John's face became hard as nails.

"I have nothing to say," he said to Evelyn. "No excuse to give. It's awful. But I must go through it somehow. Will you go to the office by the City Road? I will draw off the Nile."

He did not wait to hear her answer, but strode downstairs two at a time, and buttoning up his coat-collar in the shop, prepared himself for the worst. But just as he raised the latch of the door a quiet voice said behind him:

"Please do not walk too fast. I am going with you."

He wheeled in astonishment, to find Miss Grey at his elbow.

"With me!" he cried, "through this?"

She nodded.

"I would not miss it for the world."

She was transformed. All secretarial dignity and gravity had vanished. Yet her eyes were not laughing at him now; they were full of excitement and joyous anticipation.

"The Nile is out," she said, with mock solemnity, totally oblivious of Mrs. Symes, grimly observant, behind the counter. "A situation has arisen that looks most serious. But you shall not meet the consequences of your crimes alone, since you told me yesterday I was partly responsible for them. Whatever happens, I meet them too, and we will face the Nile together!"

CHAPTER XXIV

SCHEMES

THE Nile was out indeed. When John and Evelyn emerged from No. 18, a whistle sounded long and shrill, followed by short, excited exclamations from small boys.

"Here he is, the champion! Hurray for the champion! Hi, hi, hi!"

And then, while some stayed to form an admiring body-guard, the rest of the urchins raced for Nile Street at the top of their speed.

At almost every door stood men, who, as John passed, gave him friendly greeting, while from the windows women stared and exchanged remarks which made his ears tingle and grow hot.

"If you repent," he whispered to Evelyn, "the City Road is clear."

She gave her head a decided shake, though her cheeks were pink.

"I never repent. I am sorry you have so little courage."

"I was never so badly scared in my life."

"Then I must stay for protection." Mischief gleamed in her eyes again at the ruefulness of his tone, and she would have laughed, but she had no breath—he walked so fast.

"If you show your fears so plainly," she panted, "they will mob you. *Please* calm yourself."

He pulled up immediately, and just then a coster, perhaps a friend of Tim Venner's, aimed an insulting remark at Evelyn. But when John wheeled swiftly upon him, the man fled precipitately, to the huge delight of the crowd.

Evelyn laughed too, though nervously. Her companion's eyes were ablaze.

"What would you have done to that man if you had caught him?" she said curiously.

"Smashed his head against the lamp-post," he said, without thinking.

The laughter died out of her face.

"Yes, I think you would," she remarked. They were near Nile Street now, and the boys, who escorted them, swept ahead round the corner.

"Hi, hi, hi!" they yelled, dancing like imps in the middle of the road. "The champion's a-coming; they are both a-coming. Whoop!"

They turned into Nile Street opposite "The Grapes," where a policeman was on "point." Here the crowd was greatest, upon which the constable put it back and then saluted with a broad, unofficial grin.

The noise was deafening now. Nile Street was crowded with stalls, and every butcher's salesman banged his board with knife or cleaver, while from a hundred throats arose a shout which Evelyn remembered all her life.

It was more than a recognition of prowess in the ring. The cheers, repeated again and again, had a ring of something deeper and more earnest. The climax came just before they reached East Road, where the stalls of the better-class men were situated. Here the crush was so great that, for the moment, John thought he would have to push through by main force. But whenever he took a step forward, room was made. Evelyn said afterwards she was not jostled once. And here an old coster, pushing aside the boys, laid a broad fist upon John's shoulder and thrust the other into his.

"Give us a shake, mister," he said in stentorian tones, "and answer a fair question, will ye?"

"Ask it," John answered, smiling, and grasping the rough hand, while the cheers stopped and all strained their ears to listen.

"Well, it's this. We want to know what your lay is here. There's some say you are only a Yank of the New York P. R. incog., and that the breeze last night was faked.

Others think that your real object was the guv'nor, as we calls him—Percival Nyne. What are you really after?"

"Nyne," John answered, speaking in tones that penetrated far and near, though he did not raise his voice. "You may tell all it concerns—Percival Nyne. Good-day."

Then, raising his hat, he walked on, followed by a murmur of surprise, which changed to a rattling cheer better worth hearing than all that had gone before.

Then they reached East Road, a main artery of traffic in these parts, and among the jingle of tram-bells and a busy crowd whose concerns were as far removed from the Nile as if it were in Manchester, the cheers died out, the boys slipped off, and John and Evelyn pursued their way in peace.

They walked for some minutes in silence. Then Evelyn said:

"You have made friends with the Nile, Mr. Glynn; but this man Nyne will never forgive or forget last night."

"I hope not," John said seriously.

"He is said to be rich. He owns, I know, a great deal of property here, and he is very vindictive."

"That is true."

"You have no doubt of beating him?"

They were at the office now, and Evelyn had taken the letters into her room, and was drawing off her gloves, standing by her desk. John warmed his hands at the fire a moment before he replied.

"I cannot say that yet. But if I understand the work of your Society, we shall have to beat him."

"You mean you will," Evelyn said significantly.

John smiled.

"It is the Committee, I understand, that runs—I mean conducts—the business of this office."

"I said the Committee was responsible," Evelyn corrected. "You and I, as members of the staff appointed by the Committee to represent them, do the work under their supervision."

John nodded gravely.

"I get a little mixed. We have no committees out West.

There are not enough white men on the plains to form one. But as to Nyne—now. I understand our business here is to improve the condition of the poor in this district. I came to help in that, and the first thing I found was Nyne. I ran up against him, as it were, and wherever I go about here the same thing happens. You did it when you had Joe in hand. Giles, I find, has been doing it all along. Nyne is like a great snag in the middle of a river we have to make navigable. Therefore, it is my intention, if you approve, to remove him. Then, but not till then, according to my reckoning, the good people—such as the clergyman who sent you to Amy Bent and all we can lay hands upon who have money, or time, and a purpose in their hearts to make the Nile a cleaner, healthier, and happier place—can be brought under your influence to carry out the ideals of your Society."

It was seldom that John spoke at such length. Indeed, Dick Brabant, had he been present, would have said, and with truth, that in the two years they had lived together he had seldom heard so many words fall from his lips at one time. But there was something in Evelyn's presence this morning, and in John's own mood, which was inspiring in a remarkable degree, and drew from him ideas that had been forming themselves in his brain all the past week. He wished for one thing to remove Evelyn's thoughts from himself and place her in the centre instead.

He did not meet with much success at first.

"That is splendid," Evelyn said thoughtfully. "But if we wait till a man of Mr. Nyne's power is removed before we do anything, we shall be a long time beginning. How do you intend to get rid of your snag?"

John laughed carelessly, yet with an expression of face that made Evelyn think of the flight of the coster in Crisp Street.

"I do not know yet. I will tell you when it is done, and I think it will not take long. All I ask is that you will leave it to me. I am afraid you think that a great deal."

"I do," Evelyn said with frank emphasis. "But I should be ungrateful, as well as foolish, to complain. I will not.

Let us pass on to the next thing. What I must know is, have we to leave everything over until the snag is disposed of?"

"Not a bit. Why should we? You have begun with Joe and Amy, and I have taken hold of Tom Symes. That man must give up the ring and must be interested in all our work. I met another helper I shall introduce to you before long, an Irishman. He will be best of all, for, if I am not mistaken, he has organising ability, and knows every thief in the Nile. At present he is deptuy of a lodging-house for Nyne in Clerkenwell."

Evelyn gave a sudden laugh.

"Oh, this is delightful! I see—I see! You will convert the main props of Mr. Nyne into members of the Society. It is glorious. I shall tell my aunt, Lady Wendover, that she will have to invite the eighty-one-tonner to dine, and General Gainsborough that the deputy must be made vice-chairman of the Committee. But, seriously, I do begin to see, at last, what all you have been doing means. It makes me feel most unpleasantly small. The improvement of the people by the people. Why did we never think of it before? Amy, now, will be a power among work-girls; Joe, at your suggestion, shall join a sick club and get members from all the young men he used to meet in those dreadful boxing competitions Amy has told me about. I really think we ought to enrol Mr. Brabant too, though please don't tell him I mentioned his name in the same breath as 'your thief,' as he calls poor Joe, and make him start a club and institute in Crisp Street. He is great at such work."

John drew a quick breath of resolution. The ball he most wanted had been thrown at his feet. He had only to pick it up. Yet it was hard to do it, now that the moment had come; but he did not hesitate.

"That idea had already come into my head," he said. "I mentioned it to him on Sunday. He is with us heart and soul. But my notion goes further than men. If we deal with them alone it means splitting the family. We must have the wives and the sisters in as well. Will you take that side, with Amy to help?"

He wondered what she would answer. Would she see?

He had not to wait long.

"Certainly I will take it, if you think I can. I know plenty of girls who would join us. And Mrs. Merwell, the Vicar's wife, would superintend and be with us heart and soul. Mr. Brabant, working under you, should be capital for the men's side. How our scheme does grow."

John's breath came back to him speedily. His point was gained. The rest was but a question of time. But at the bottom of his heart there were heaviness and a depression. He told himself it was because he was very tired.

After some further talk, a man came in on business, and while John saw him, Evelyn set to work to open her letters. The "scheme" was not discussed again that day. At one o'clock Giles arrived. He was in a very anxious state of mind, and being weary in body as well, was as cross as it was possible for so equable a temperament to be. But it happened that when he came in Evelyn and John were doing accounts together, and the keen eyes of the old man saw at once that their relationship had changed. The sight disposed of all his spleenfulness in an instant, and he replied to Evelyn's greeting with his habitual geniality.

"And what do ye think of the little barney at 'The Grapes,' miss? Now tell us 'honest."

"Worthy of your genius, Giles," she replied with a mischievous smile. "I understand that, in consequence of what you did, and Mr. Brabant did, Mr. Glynn himself being a rather languid looker-on, as far as I can make out, Mr. Nyne was shaken, Mr. Symes depressed, and the Nile happy. I beg to congratulate you and Mr. Brabant."

Giles looked from one to the other with a broad smile.

"Did he say that, miss?" he exclaimed in a deep voice, while his great shoulders shook. "Did he, now? No. I can well believe that he meant to. But you know him too well, by half now, for him to dare. Did any one ever hear such a story since he was born?"

Nothing would satisfy Evelyn now but giving Giles a detailed account of the morning's adventures.

"Mr. Glynn calls last night only a beginning," she said. "I call it laying the foundation-stone of a great work. What is your opinion, Giles?"

She spoke seriously, and the old man took time to answer, thrusting his hands deeply into his pockets and leaning against the folding doors with his feet apart and his head bent a little forward.

"My opinion, Miss Grey, is the same as yours on one condition, but on that condition only. The man who laid that stone must build the house from floor to roof, else it will fall down like a pack of cards. That brings me to a little question. I should like to hear, just for my own knowledge, how long Mr. Glynn means to go on a-working in the Nile himself?"

Evelyn laughed at the question, though it impressed her, as Giles meant it should, for she knew he was not the man to ask it without reason.

John met the attack imperturbably.

"I shall stay while I am needed, Giles. I told you so once before."

"I know you did, sir," Giles answered drily. "And a very good answer it is, but it don't go far enough for me. Who is to be judge, pray, whether you be needed or no? Miss Grey, for instance, or you?"

John smiled steadily back into the anxious eyes and shook his head.

"We shall see, Giles, when the time comes."

CHAPTER XXV

THE SUPERINTENDENT OF POLICE

It was an hour after noon, on the second day following the fight, John and Giles were alone in the office, writing.

"Giles," John said suddenly, "lunch with me in the City Road this morning; there is something on your mind."

Giles took out his watch.

"Thank'ee, sir, but I was going to make so bold as to ask you to lunch with me to-day, to meet a friend."

John gave a nod of intelligence. "Sam Smith, Superintendent of Police."

Giles chuckled.

"You are sharp, sir, an' no mistake. If you'd been in the service they would have put you into plain clothes in six months; not that you would have done well at that work."

"Too fond of my own way."

The old man laughed.

"A good guess, but not the right one. A plain-clothes man to get on has to tell a few lies, sir, now and then, and that you will never do."

As they went up Critchett Place John saw that Giles was keeping a sharp lookout.

"I do hope Sam will be at the Scrope Arms to-day," he said, half to himself. "He generally is at this time, but there's no telling. He don't know I'm bringing you. I only thought of that this morning, when information was brought to me by a sergeant I know."

"Bad news?"

"Ah!" and Giles frowned, "bad news indeed, and if we don't catch Smith—Good!" His face brightened, and he quickened his pace. "There's our gentleman, right enough, and he's waiting for us, I do declare. Then he must have

news for me. Step up, sir, if you will be so good, and don't look right or left. We has to meet on the strict Q. T., Sam Smith and me, just now."

The Scrope Arms was a large public house at a corner where four roads met. They entered by a private door, and went up carpeted stairs to the first floor, and into a room handsomely furnished, where a table was laid for one. Giles rang the bell; a waiter appeared swiftly.

"Mornin', Tim," he said, in answer to the man's respectful grin of recognition. "Bring up for two whatever Mr. Smith is having, and be sharp, my lad."

"Right you are, Mr. Giles. Have you seen the paper, sir?"

He pulled a copy of the *Times* off a massive sideboard, approached John slowly, and handed it to him with a bow.

"D'ye know why he did that?" Giles said, laughing, as the man disappeared. "He was at 'The Grapes' on Monday, and wanted now to get a look at your muscle close. He was champion light weight in the competitions at the Hall last year. They know ye well in the Nile, and no wonder. I never see such hitting, never, and I've seen a bit in my time."

There is no knowing how long Giles would have continued in this strain, much to John's weariness, but now the door opened again, and a man John had seen outside the Scrope Arms, strolling up the New North Road, came into the room, hung up a heavy coat behind the door, then closed it carefully.

John scanned the new-comer with interest. Sooner or later he knew that he should have to reckon with the police, and with this man most of all, for a Divisional Superintendent in the Metropolis is monarch of all he surveys in his district, under the Commissioners, and practically controls the promotion or otherwise of from five to six hundred men.

A curious man in appearance was Mr. Samuel Smith. He was of large build, with broad, florid face, fleshy nose, strong and masterful, big jowl, and wide mouth, as far as could be seen under the short beard and moustache.

In body he looked clumsy and unwieldy, having enormous

hands, and arms far too long for his height—though that was six feet—and great round shoulders. The most extraordinary feature of the man, however, was his eyes. They were large, prominent, and of the lightest blue, veritable codfish eyes, as weak and gentle and dull in expression as those of the White Knight. His hair was in keeping with his eyes—thin and smooth, a colourless brown, and parted down the middle.

"How d'ye do, Alfred?" he said, in a voice high pitched, slow, and expressionless. "Cold day."

He did not appear to see John at all.

Giles only nodded in reply, but began to rub his hands, while his brown eyes twinkled.

"Your friend," Mr. Smith continued, warming his back at a big fire, "looks as well as can be expected."

Giles glanced at John and winked.

"Thanks, Superintendent," John replied, as if he had been addressed, "I am in excellent health and spirits."

The great man blinked at him vaguely.

"It is an act punishable by law to spar without gloves," he said, in an absent tone; "what might be the weight of yours, sir, Monday night?"

Giles gave a delighted chuckle. "And he knows as well as I do you had none. Now you understand what Smith is," he said to John, "soft as a pat of butter to look at, as sour as green apples inside. Shame upon ye, Sam; and to my friend, too. But I know your meaning, and that's why I came here to meet you to-day. I find that this morning some one laid information against Mr. Glynn, and that orders were given for his apprehension this afternoon. Now, what's to be done about it?"

The waiter now entered with lunch. When they were alone again, Giles repeated his question. Mr. Smith broke bread in silence, and then drank John's health in a glass of beer.

"You find the Nile," he said, with his mouth full, "a good place to work in, don't you, sir?"

John began to like the man.

"I do," he answered, with emphasis.

Mr. Smith nodded, and went on with his lunch.

"So I thought," he said; then looking at Giles. "There is nothing to be done, Alfred; you have come to me too late."

He spoke with funereal gravity.

"Then off I goes straight to Critchett the solicitor," Giles cried; "he's the smartest I knows for police court business. We must be ready for 'em. But it's a bad job, a very bad job indeed. The Committee will not like it, and I do hate to think of Miss Grey in the box."

"Miss Grey shall not go into the box," John said, with a decision that made the Superintendent raise his eyes slowly from his plate.

"If she's subpœnaed she must, Mr. Glynn, pardon me," Giles answered.

"But the police will not want her evidence. She was not at 'The Grapes.'"

"I tell you, sir, if Nyne once starts on such a job as this——"

"Nyne?" John interrupted. "I am going to call on Nyne this afternoon."

He smiled tranquilly, and resumed his lunch, while Giles laughed.

"Samuel Smith, did you ever see the like of that?"

"It is the next move to make," the Superintendent said, "though Nyne won't move."

"But Mr. Glynn will be took before he gets there."

Mr. Smith shook his head.

"You should make sure that your information is correct, Alfred."

"You said it was too late yourself."

"Yes, to prosecute your friend. I told Inspector Halkin that."

"Halkin!" Giles cried, with a start. "Now I see the whole thing. I might have known, too. Mr. Glynn," he added, "there's no need to trouble. Mr. Smith stopped it. But, Sam, tell us what you did. I know you hate doing that, but I want Mr. Glynn to have a full insight into all that is going,

and you'll agree that he should, seeing what he has before him with the guv'nor. What did you say to the Inspector to stop the prosecution? It was rare good luck that you happened to be at the station."

"That is what Halkin said," Mr. Smith remarked pensively.

"But not what he thought," Giles cried. "This here inspector," he said to John, "is a snake in the grass, and a poisonous one. There's something between him and the guv'nor which I can't fathom. But the men tell me that those two are thicker than thieves. It makes me nervous when I thinks of you. I don't doubt your strength and cleverness; who would? And even Nyne ain't much deeper. But this Halkin is a different card, from his position. He's Chief Inspector now, and is next to Mr. Smith, here, in authority in the division—high in favour of the Commissioners. Still, come to that"—here the old man straightened himself, and spoke slowly—"Halkin will have to reckon with me, and if he makes trouble, there'll be a settling day between us."

"Alfred, you keep your hands clear of Halkin, mind you that."

Mr. Smith spoke a little less softly now.

Giles tossed his head like a horse that does not like the bit.

"Let him mind, then, what he's at."

"No," snapped the Superintendent, "you leave him entirely to me. He's a friend of mine, is Halkin."

Giles shot a glance of deep intelligence at John, and his face cleared.

"Very well, Samuel, very well; I leave him in good hands. What did you do about the guv'nor when Halkin showed you his deposition?"

"I listened," Mr. Smith said, "until he ran dry. Then I started him again; and then, I suppose, I asked a few questions. He wanted my opinion. I wanted his. He suggested prosecution, because we could not afford to offend Nyne, seeing that he had track of all the guns in the Nile, and could put us on it whenever we wanted them."

"He is right there," growled Giles. "I told Mr. Glynn that. What did you answer to all this?"

Mr. Smith bit off the end of a cigar, and struck a match.

"Told him to get up a little earlier in the morning."

"Oh, ho! that would please him."

"I asked him why he had forgotten that your chairman, General Gainsborough, was brother-in-law to the Chief Commissioner, and whether he would like an inquiry to be held concerning his way of doing business in the Nile. The rest"—he threw his match into the fire—"I leave you to fill in, Alfred. Mr. Glynn, I wish you a good day."

He held out his large hand, which John pressed cordially.

"I have much to thank you for," he said; "you will let me know, I trust, if there is any way I can pay the score."

Mr. Smith smiled for the first time.

"I have a score to pay myself before you leave the Nile."

"One thing more, Sam," exclaimed Giles; "tell us, before you go, what Halkin answered."

"He thanked me," the Superintendent replied, still smiling, "and then said that if Nyne were to leave the Nile, the police would lose their best friend, and go into mourning. He asked me what he was to do."

"That is just what I wanted to get at," Giles cried. "And you now, what did you say, Sam?"

"I told him to buy crape," and, with a nod, the Superintendent leisurely left the room.

Giles gave a great laugh of relief and thankfulness. "That's over. Sam is with us, and we'll never have any trouble now from the police. But there is more in it than that. Sam is doing something on his own. I wonder what that lay is going to be."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE TIE THAT BINDS

PERCIVAL NYNE lived in Westmoreland Place, a turning off the City Road. The house was convenient for his work, and was suitable in many ways for a single, elderly gentleman of retired habits.

Westmoreland Place was a *cul-de-sac*, and though it opened upon the City Road with its ever-increasing traffic and Nile Street crossed it in the centre, the upper end of the place was quiet and secluded, and until quite lately was inhabited by people of the highest respectability. As to the character of the persons who lived at the lower end, the less said the better. But in London the two ends of one street are socially often as far apart as the poles.

Nyne's house was at the upper end, and was to be distinguished from its neighbours by the superior whiteness of the steps and cleanness of the windows. Nyne's housekeeper was a mulatto woman, who was looked upon by the neighbours with the darkest suspicion, but in the virtues of cleanliness and industry there were few to compare in the Nile with Mrs. Nappold. No one in the place knew her history, and as she was a comely, middle-aged woman, and lived with two children alone in the house with her master, her reputation, if she had any to lose, was of little value in the place. Nor did it improve when the neighbours found that by no device known to woman was Mrs. Nappold to be drawn into the mildest gossip about the guv'nor's concerns. After this fact became established, in a manner not too pleasant for the innocent inquirers, for Mrs. Nappold possessed an extensive and varied vocabulary, her position became as isolated as if she lived in the desert of Sahara. As this was what she wished, no one was the worse, and her

master much the better. But there must be a reason for it, people said. There was a very good reason. Twelve years before a man was murdered in the Nile. The crime was committed at "The Grapes," and the murderer was taken into custody before the blood was dry upon his knife. This man was Mrs. Nappold's husband. He had borne an excellent character, and no one had a word against him except that his temper, when roused, was fiendish; but the murder was shown to be premeditated, and Jonathan Nappold would have been hanged had it not been for Percival Nyne. He knew the man, who had served him on more than one occasion, and to Nyne Mrs. Nappold went for help in her trouble. He gave it without stint, and the prisoner was defended by the ablest of criminal lawyers. Provocation was proved, a fearful record against the victim was laid before the jury, and, in the end, Nappold was sent into penal servitude for fifteen years.

Since then Mrs. Nappold had managed Mr. Nyne's house, and Nyne had kept her and the children. The morning after the fight at "The Grapes," Nappold returned home on ticket-of-leave. He arrived at daybreak, and spent the whole day in the house, at first with his patron, afterwards with his family. At nightfall he departed to some lodging of his own, and from that time onward spent each day at Nyne's house and the night away. A short, broad man, strong as a bull and lithe as a panther, with a sallow face and straight hair, and the thick lips and dark eyes of the negro. A quiet fellow, with the patient nature of his race, until aroused. Nappold the Nigger, as he had been called in the Nile, was counted a bad enemy, and on this man, after all he had done for him and his, Nyne could count to the death.

Nyne had other visitors this week—visitors of many kinds and various conditions; and early on the afternoon of the day that John lunched with Mr. Samuel Smith there came to Westmoreland Place Chief Inspector Halkin of the police.

He walked up the steps with the rapid stride of one who had often been before, and knocked three times at the front door. It was opened presently by a spring from within,

closing afterwards automatically, while the Inspector passed on to an inner door, at which he rapped with his knuckles, entering immediately into a room beyond it without waiting for a reply.

Nyne was in this room, and the Inspector, nodding carelessly, proceeded to divest himself of his cap and heavy cape.

The room was of moderate size, with two windows half-covered with wire-blinds, which would have given it the appearance of an office but for the furniture. This was curiously rich and luxurious for a house in such a neighbourhood. The floor was covered with heavy Turkey carpets and rugs, faded now, but rich in colouring, and very costly. Even the Inspector's heavy step made no more noise than if his foot had been the paw of a cat. There were armchairs, low and soft and inviting, and under the windows a broad divan with many cushions, while over the fire-place, large and old-fashioned, were massive bronze jars, and in the center a hookah of costly workmanship which a Sultan need not have disdained. Even the light which the owner of the room was using now, for the day was dull and foggy, was an immense brass lamp, hanging by heavy chains from the ceiling.

The only piece of furniture in the room in keeping with western civilisation was a large roller-topped desk, where Nyne was working at the moment. But the contrast of this was lost in the appearance of the man himself. He wore a fez of black cloth, a loose robe of cashmere, and Turkish slippers embroidered with gold and silver thread.

Upon the Inspector's entrance, Nyne, who was making entries in a large ledger, pointed to one of the armchairs without turning his head.

"Let me finish," he said. "The decanter is on the top shelf and the cigars in the usual place. Help yourself."

He continued to write methodically, while his visitor, having mixed himself a stiff glass of brandy and soda, picked with great care the best cigar he could find.

At length Nyne rose, put his book away, and locked up his desk, trying the catch afterwards with the habit of a man particular in such matters, and drawing another armchair up to the fire, lit a cigarette.

"Cold and damp," he muttered. "What a damned climate this is; so you bring bad news."

The visitor scowled. He was clearly in a bad temper.

"You are wonderful knowing to-day."

"I have watched your face for five minutes."

"I thought you were doing accounts."

"I was," Nyne said, folding his hands. "Yours. Now let me hear it all."

"Things are rank," said the other, lowering his eyes as Nyne looked up into them with a characteristic twist of his neck. "Smith is on the job. He will not prosecute."

"Then all I said to you went to him, did it?"

The Inspector showed his teeth.

"So likely, ain't it? He knows from the other side."

"That's Giles," Nyne murmured, as if he were thinking, "dear old Giles. His reasons?"

"This bloke of yours has friends related to the Chief Commissioner. If I started for him that way, it might be more than my place is worth."

"Your place?" Nyne said with a sneer, slowly. "Your place, James, is worth exactly what I make it. No more, no less, which is awkward for you."

At this Halkin's face, which was naturally high-coloured, became almost purple; but he kept his rage within bounds.

"No worse for me than you. If I went down, what would you do?"

"Follow Mr. Smith's advice. James Halkin, my worthy friend, you are becoming very little use to me."

The Inspector gave a harsh, unpleasant laugh, though his hand shook as he took a pull at the brandy.

"Throw me over, then, and see. But I can't run my head against Smith. He's harder than a stone wall. It won't pay you either."

"Mr. Smith is a great man," Nyne remarked sententiously. "You can never take his place, James."

"That is for the Commissioners to say, mate, five months hence, when Smith is pensioned."

The brandy was going to his head a little, for he had not lunched, and he laughed boastfully.

Nyne leaned forward in his chair.

"What do the Commissioners know, James? Nothing. Supposing I were to tell them, eh? A letter to Scotland Yard would do it, or word to Smith himself. He's a great man, I say. I am not sure that I had not better make my peace with him. Let us see, let us see."

He was speaking in a purring tone through his teeth.

"There was that Stamford Hill burglary business, when you were complimented by the Chief Commissioner. I might mention how you came by your information. Then there were those utterers of false coin in Clerkenwell. How clever every one said you were. They did not know I drew up the plan which did the trick. And the King's Cross murder job. Night and day you were at it, the papers said. You and I know what you were really at. There's much more, but we will let it rest at that. If these facts were known, James, where would you be six months hence? And it would pay me, now, to make them known."

The Inspector rose slowly with an effort. His face was white, his forehead damp with perspiration. He tossed his half-finished cigar into the grate and threw the cape over his arm.

"I'm off then," he said, hoarsely. "Break me and see."

Nyne rose too, and his voice changed.

"That would pay me, I say, and pay me well. But there's something would pay me better, James, as I am circumstanced. Shall I tell you, or would you rather go?"

"Go on," was the sullen rejoinder. But he put his cape on the chair again.

"It would pay me best if you kept the promise you made when they appointed you Chief Inspector after the murder job. Do you remember what you said?"

"That I would see you through if you were ever tied up."

"I am tied up now. If you help me you shall be Superintendent in six months. If you don't, say good-bye to promotion."

"I will not fight Smith."

"Will you fool him?"

The Inspector hesitated.

"That is a hard job."

"Humbug," Nyne snarled. "Will you help me so long as it can be done without Smith's knowledge? Yes or no?"

The Inspector nodded.

"And ask no questions?"

"Tell us what you want."

Nyne considered a moment.

"I will tell you one thing. There are always two constables outside the Warren after dark."

"Yes, since that publican was kicked to death."

"Kicked, was he?" Nyne murmured. "To death!"—then he raised his voice. "I want you to take away your men one day, when I give notice. There must not be a constable within hearing from three to six in the afternoon."

Halkin moved his feet uneasily.

"That would be risky. I might be held responsible. The Warren has the devil of a name. Why?"

"No questions," Nyne retorted sharply. "Yes or no."

"If nothing else will do you, it might be managed."

"It must."

"That is all then?"

"For the present. But there may be another bit later. Have more drink, Superintendent."

He leered and chuckled as he mouthed the word. Halkin swung on his cape.

"Not a drop. I have took too much from you already. So-long."

He strode away into the open air, and did not pause till he stood at the bottom of the steps.

"Six months; aye, I must wait that time, and keep on, keep on. Then, by G—d, he shall go."

He marched down the street sneezing in the yellow fog that was now creeping up everywhere, not seeing a man who was leaning against a railing not far away, and who now leisurely followed in the same direction—Mr. Samuel Smith.

CHAPTER XXVII

SNAKE CHARMING

JOHN did not go to see Nyne as soon as he had intended. After consultation with Giles, he decided to wait a week, to see whether the man made any public move, such as a personal prosecution for assault.

In the meantime the work of the office went on as usual, except that now John shared in it, which made a considerable difference.

In the first place, he took over the whole of the accounts; then he arranged that all inquiries and visits in the Nile were to be left to him, unless a woman's hand was needed in the case. Lastly, he placed himself at the secretary's disposal for any interviews with men, from the officials of the local public bodies and employers of labour to the gentlemen whose sensitive natures were hurt by inquiries and questions, and whose addresses were usually small shops, where they did not live, but where they paid the proprietor of the shop one penny for each letter received; men who never wanted "charity," but only a little Christian sympathy and good-fellowship to the tune of a loan (without security) for £5 or £10.

Evelyn found that in all dealings with men her worker's judgment was seldom at fault. He possessed in a high degree quick sympathies, combined with the self-control and balance of mind which can discriminate not only between sheep and goats, but between the persons whose troubles can be removed, or at least alleviated with good results, and those who, for their soul's sake, if such manhood and womanhood as they have are to be preserved, must be left alone to help themselves.

Besides the ordinary work of the office, however, a pre-

liminary meeting of those interested in John's scheme for systematic social work in the Nile was held at Mr. Merwell's vicarage.

Tom Symes was there, in spite of his black eyes, Giles, Amy and Joe, John, Evelyn, and Dick. Dick made his mark that evening. He had written down notes of John's ideas, and some of his own, and so dealt with his subject, that the whole company, which included the Vicar and his wife, were fired with enthusiasm.

It is the fashion of the "practical man" to think that persons of imagination are only fit for "fancy work." This is sometimes a mistake. And Dick, this night, showed that he possessed constructive power of a high order. Under his hand the meeting saw an "Institute" arise in Relton which would be a centre of healthy social life and work. It would contain a large room to be used for debates and by lodges of friendly societies, a lending library, a cricket and football club, a "sports" club—to manage a gymnasium and all physical exercises for men—of which committee Tom Symes was nominated as chairman then and there, with Giles as treasurer. A special feature of the Institute was to be the attractions it should provide for girls, including an ambulance class, musical drill, dancing class, and sewing class. The foundation of the whole enterprise was to be the energy and self-management of the people of the Nile themselves. As to the money required for the purpose, Dick was able to state that the full amount of establishment charges was guaranteed by a friend, whose name, however, he was not to mention on pain of death. The income was also assured, providing that all members paid such contributions as might be considered adequate by the Committee. This assurance of financial stability was received by every one but John with cheers and knowing laughter. It was then decided that the scheme should be printed, circulated privately among working men and women in the Nile known to those present, and if it met with approval, a meeting of all who desired to become original members was to be held to elect a committee and set to work.

Notwithstanding all this cheerful, energetic work and planning, however, a cloud hung over the Nile—Percival Nyne.

No institute could be established, or other constructive work be properly begun, until it was certain that he did not possess the power, as he would certainly have the will, to bring it to ruin.

His name was not mentioned at the meeting about the Institute, but after it was over, and Evelyn, John, Dick, and Giles remained by invitation to have supper with the Merwells, the Vicar spoke of him, and asked whether any one knew what he was likely to do.

John answered.

"Leave that to me," he said. "I will prevent any trouble there. Do not give him another thought."

He would say no more than this, but Mr. Merwell gave a contented smile and nodded to his wife, while Giles chuckled, and beneath the table softly rubbed his hands.

No action was taken against John by Nyne. John on his side was not idle. He procured Joe a situation as locksmith —for they found that Joe was really clever at his trade— with a large ironmonger in Relton, who had reasons for detesting Nyne. The wages were thirty shillings weekly, which would enable Joe to marry Amy as soon as she returned from the convalescent home, where she was going immediately. The five pounds Joe owed to the Committee he was to work off, after business hours, in fitting up the Institute—for he was a good rough carpenter and joiner. The furniture needed by the young couple was to be a wedding present from John. It is needless to say that there were but two happier people in the Nile than Joe and Amy. With Tom Symes John held several long consultations, which brought about as an immediate result the total discontinuance of Tom's attendance at a certain club in St. Pancras, where a fraternity of betting men, sports, and gamblers of chequered career and reputation, held symposium until the small hours. On the other hand, John went himself with Tom to a place frequented by gentlemen of the ring

and their patrons, and was received with all the honours of the establishment, and made the guest of the evening. The only man he could not see was Patrick Malony. The day after the fight the Irishman had left the lodging-house in Clerkenwell Close. No one knew the reason, nor could John discover where he had gone.

Matters being in this position, John excused himself one morning from attendance at the office "through private business," and at ten o'clock raised the knocker at Nyne's door in Westmoreland Place.

Mrs. Nappold answered the summons, and John, who was now as observant as a Western scout on Indian territory when there has been a raid, saw that he was recognised. Mr. Nyne was at home, he was told. Would he send in his card? He did so, waiting on the mat meanwhile, and listening to the breathing of a man, which was clearly audible to his quick ear, on the stairs leading to the basement.

"Mr. Nyne will see you, sir."

Mrs. Nappold opened the door, and then stood beside it as John walked down the passage. Her dark face was calm, but when John glanced at her as he passed, he saw her eyes move as if in answer to some signal. Then the door was closed behind him with a click, and he was alone with Percival Nyne.

Nyne was in his dressing-gown and slippers. A small table was drawn up near the fire, and on it was laid a book half open, as if he had been reading, and thrust between the leaves, a paper-knife.

John was accustomed, when in dangerous places, to note only those details important for the purpose he had in hand, and to-day, though he gathered a general impression of the Turkey carpets, the bronze ornaments, the divan, and the rest of it, he concentrated his interest upon Mr. Nyne's paper-knife.

It was a dagger of curious make and great strength and keenness.

Nyne bowed grimly to his visitor, and motioned him to

a chair on the other side of the fire-place. John bowed in return, took up a light wooden chair, placed it within reach of the table, and as he sat down, quietly picked up the dagger.

The movement was so dextrous and so swiftly executed that Nyne, though he dropped back at his enemy's sudden approach and laid his hand on the book, felt the knife slip from between his fingers.

"Excuse me," John said politely, feeling the point and edge of the weapon; "useful things, knives, in their proper places, but to-day, as it happens, I have come on other business. Let me put this out of the way. I should not like you to be hurt again."

While he spoke he looked round, placed the knife upon the top of the roller-desk, and then resumed his seat as if nothing had happened.

Nyne, meanwhile, had slowly settled himself in his arm-chair.

"Tell me your business," he said, in a cold voice. He sat still, and crouching, his round head peeping out of his big dressing-gown, his head bent forward in his favourite attitude, reminding John of a coiled snake.

"My business is to try and come to an understanding with you."

"You made a bad beginning the other night."

He spoke without apparent emotion, as if he were talking of something that did not concern him in the least.

"It was a bad beginning," John answered sympathetically, "for you. But you will make the best of it, I dare-say."

"You assaulted me with violence," Nyne continued, "though you had no provocation. I have been advised to prosecute, and have you put in prison. Perhaps I might. But as I am a merciful man and a very quiet one, I wish to live in peace."

"Very well put," John said politely. "Only why did you arm yourself with a knife, then, which was sharpened on the oil-stone only this morning?"

He extended his fingers, and pointed to a black mark on one of them.

"But come," he continued cheerfully, "let us get to business. What are the facts? These, I take it: That you have had your way in the Nile for some years, but from the night we met at 'The Grapes' will not have it any longer. You have made the Nile a thieves' paradise, and the Warren a hell. Your friends in this place are the worst hooligans and the smartest cracksmen in London. You encourage the lads to be thieves, and their girls prostitutes. I have come here, and those I represent, to stop this. We shall do it, whatever it costs in money, in broken bones, in lives. Therefore, there is not room, Mr. Nyne, for us and you in the Nile. I hope I have made myself clear."

A slight smile flickered upon Nyne's loose lips, and then vanished.

"Go on, go on."

"Thank you. What is to be done about it? Obviously only one thing. Either your grip of the Nile must be loosened or I must tighten my grip upon you. Did you speak?"

The man had made a curious sound in his throat. But he shook his head at the question, and only moistened his lips with his tongue.

"I beg your pardon. Well, my proposal is that you shall retire from a position which, to a man of your age, cannot be very pleasant. I have thought of how this can be done, and a plan has occurred to me. Would you care to hear it?"

"I will hear it."

"Thank you. It happens that I have some means and no responsibilities. I am willing to take off your hands, at a fair valuation, all the house-property you hold in the Nile, including the Warren, also the debts which the men about here owe you. Your shops, and so on, I cannot touch, but they do not concern me much. It is the houses and the debts I will take and pay for. How does that strike you as an idea?"

He paused, and there was a short silence. Nyne had

scarcely moved or changed in expression of face since the talk began, and one not observing him closely would have thought he scarcely heard what had been said. But John knew differently. He saw that under the folds of the dressing-gown the thin frame of the man was shaking with excitement either of fear or anger, or both.

In truth, Nyne was experiencing most peculiar emotions. He had seen much in his long life of dangerous men. It had been his business to play upon the passion and caprice of the worst, an operation requiring strong nerves and steady courage. Moreover, he had done it successfully, and had never feared to risk his life in the process. Yet to-day, before this man, he felt as if the doors and windows of his room had suddenly been opened to let in the bitter winter air. He could not speak at all for some moments, and when he did so at last it was in a hoarse, strained voice.

"I will think of it. I will let you have an answer in a week."

John observed the man narrowly.

"A week," he said slowly. "Very well, then; but if I do not hear in a week, I must come and see you again. Good-morning."

He found the passage empty and let himself out.

Nyne did not move or speak, and when Mrs. Nappold came in a little later, she found that he had fainted.

CHAPTER XXVIII

EVELYN ASSERTS HER INDEPENDENCE

THE scheme for the regeneration of the Nile was by no means confined to the establishment of an institute.

When John had cited the cases of Joe and Amy to Evelyn as examples of what might be done, and had urged that as time went on more people should be dealt with and helped to better things, through the Committee of the Society gaining personal hold of the inner life of the Nile, he had planted a seed in her mind which was destined to bear strange fruit.

The day after the interview with Nyne, just as they had finished opening the letters, Evelyn said:

"I have something to tell you. I was going over my work yesterday, and found that you do half of it. That discovery has given me food for thought which will presently be translated into work of my own. Do you approve?"

She knew beforehand exactly what the answer would be, and her eyes smiled, though her mouth was grave, as John threw back his head with a characteristic jerk:

"I do not, until we are rid of the Snag."

They had christened Nyne by this name since their talk the first day after the fight, and seldom called him by any other between themselves.

"But you saw him yesterday," Evelyn said, demurely. "You did not tell me you were going, by-the-bye. I thought he must be defunct, or at least a cripple for life."

John smiled at her tone.

"I did not tell you," he said, "because I went to make him a proposal, and he has deferred his answer until next week. When that answer comes I shall tell you about it. How did you know I saw him?"

Evelyn pursed her lips.

"I know more than I tell, like other people."

Then they both laughed.

"I will tell what I know," he said. "I offered to buy up the Snag's property in the Nile, including the Warren, and take over the money owed to him by private people. That is all, honestly."

Evelyn's eyes were eloquent in their enthusiasm.

"What a tremendous scheme! Oh, if it could only be! But that is impossible. He will never do it. Amy tells me that he values the power he has over the men in the Nile far more than the money he makes out of them."

"Amy is right," John said seriously, adding, in a significant tone: "Therefore it is not fit or proper for Miss Evelyn Grey to go to work on her own account in the Nile—yet."

Evelyn's lips stiffened.

"Miss Evelyn Grey is very much obliged, but she gives Mr. John Glynn notice, and everybody else whom it may concern, that being of age and having a little will of her own, she is going to do exactly what she thinks right."

John looked at her gravely, then squared his shoulders, brought his feet together, and made a low bow.

"I beg Miss Grey's pardon," he said. "When does she begin, and where?"

"I am not sure that I shall tell you."

"I shall find out."

"And then prevent it. Oh, you might as well tell the whole truth. It is written in your eye, upon your mouth, and most plainly of all in your hands."

He put his hands behind his back.

"You are mistaken for once. I am not a believer in women wrapping themselves in cotton wool under a glass case. I give you my word that you shall not be interfered with if I can help it. But I want to know particulars."

She glanced down at the letters before her and considered a moment.

"I would rather not tell you anything. I wonder whether you can guess why?"

He tugged at his moustache and smiled doubtfully.

"I could guess, but I might be rude. I have still a grizzly's manners, though you have tamed them a good deal."

She looked at him in real surprise.

"I have not been conscious of exercising the least influence. Rather the contrary."

Something in the tone of the last words gave him the clue he needed.

"Then I will give my guess. You find the supervision of your affairs by an animal of my description, which, though it may have good intentions, has also very clumsy paws, rather wearisome; and this time you intend striking a trail of your own, if you will forgive the Westernism."

"It is a delightful Westernism," Evelyn said, as a look of pleased relief came into her eyes, "and expresses my case precisely. But please, please do not talk any more nonsense about grizzly bears. It was a tasteless joke at best, and now, after what you have done and intend to do, it is positively obnoxious to me."

John swept up a pile of case-papers.

"Thank you," he said gravely. "Good luck to your lone trail."

He went into the other room and, sitting down at a place he had made for himself at Giles's table, began his work for the day, and left Evelyn alone with her letters.

It was a quiet morning, for few people came in, and all of those John dealt with. Evelyn, therefore, had ample time and opportunity to write a score of letters. Yet she only succeeded in accomplishing two. John perceived this when he came in just before lunch to report the visits he was going to make that afternoon, and he put it down to her interest in her new schemes. Great would have been his astonishment had he known what it was that spoilt Miss Grey's work of the morning.

Evelyn was by nature a person who loved her own way, and though her training had not been altogether a bed of roses—partly because it had not been so—she had developed

the quality of self-will. As a child she had been practically brought up by her aunt, Lady Wendover, for until her father's death her mother had accompanied him wherever his regiment was ordered. Now Lady Wendover believed in the most modern methods of girl-training, and was an enthusiast for coeducation. Evelyn went to school with boys until she was twelve, and was then sent to an expensive Ladies' College with the specific object of graduating at Newnham later on. No expense was spared in her education, and in her holidays she was encouraged to take up boys' games and sport. By the time she was seventeen, besides doing well in her studies, she was a superb rider, captain of the school hockey team, an excellent bat at cricket, and a good shot. Money was, comparatively speaking, of no consequence, and her chief object in life was to take a good degree and be first in every game. Indeed to lead, to command, was ever her instinct; and being possessed of superabundant health and strength, brains, good temper, and a perseverance when it was a question of having her own way which was almost unlimited, she generally succeeded.

When she was seventeen, however, her father died; her mother returned to England, and the whole course of her life changed.

She was offered her choice of lives, and had she so willed, might have lived still with her aunt in the great house at Park Lane, become a distinguished university student, perhaps ultimately the head of a college, and at the worst a successful teacher. But this would have meant that her mother must live alone, for Colonel Grey had no private means, and Mrs. Grey's money had been lost some years before in a disastrous investment made by a brother, since dead. Moreover, Mrs. Grey was not at all strong, so Evelyn did not hesitate a moment. All offers from her aunt to help her to continue her studies were gratefully but uncompromisingly refused, and after completing her last year at school she settled down quietly in the little house in Hampstead and devoted all her strength and energy to mak-

ing herself the companion, nurse, and helpmate of her heart-broken and delicate mother.

She never regretted her choice, for stronger in Evelyn even than the delight in power and leadership was the true woman's longing to love and be loved by some one to whom she was all in all, and Mrs. Grey was the gentlest and most unselfish of mothers, and with a sympathy and understanding of a girl's life far beyond most women. Yet the new life had many trials, and there were times when Evelyn became as restless as a young eaglet on a barn-door roost.

Then the work of the Society came and proved her salvation. At first she worked as visitor and private secretary for her aunt. Then one never-to-be-forgotten day she was sent for by Mr. Brooke himself and sent off to visit certain schools and orphanages, with instructions to draw up a report, which was to be placed among the official records. It was the beginning of a new existence. Every quality she possessed was brought into play. The work was given originally for training her judgment and testing her capacity; but in one of the schools, which had borne hitherto a high reputation, Evelyn discovered evidence of peculation and tyranny. At Mr. Brooke's suggestion she was allowed to pursue her inquiries in her own way, and as far as she chose, under his supervision. The result was an exposure which ruined the matron, practically saved the lives of some delicate children, and led to an entire reorganisation of the institution. Incidentally it was productive of much good to the Society, while Evelyn's future was assured.

When Dick Brabant made the mistake of thinking a girl's warm friendship, and a student's appreciation of the ability of her instructor, were evidence of a woman's love, Evelyn was tasting the first fruits of much hard work and close study. The mention of love and marriage was simply an irritating discord, and the effect of it soon passed away. Then she was made responsible officer of a committee and direct representative in her district of the Society, and its leader, Edward Brooke, whom she revered as an acolyte worships (sometimes) the high priest. What she had told

Dick was the plain truth: that she lived only for her work and her mother. Into this world of Evelyn's—the world of a vigorous womanhood, but untouched by sentiment, therefore incomplete, yet womanhood, notwithstanding, and which had no longings after anything except that which it could see and touch and feel in life—came John Glynn.

Such a man, as she had acknowledged to her mother, was a revelation to Evelyn. All that she had seen of him in the pettiest details of the daily office work, as much as in his crushing blow at Percival Nyne and his wide and strong grasp of every principle and purpose in the work of the Society and its possibilities in Relton, had confirmed and strengthened her first impression. It takes strength to appreciate strength at its full worth, and Evelyn, who had consistently asserted her independence and will over others since she could remember, felt more acutely than any other person who had come into contact with John in Relton, except possibly Percival Nyne himself, the power which lay in the nature of this modest, gentle, but overwhelmingly masterful man.

During the three weeks they had worked together, her impressions about him had changed more than once. But he was too honest, too unconscious of the impressions he made upon others, too indifferent, possibly, as to what those impressions might be, for her judgment to be long in doubt, either concerning his character and disposition or his attitude towards herself. After twenty days of acquaintance she was as certain of his honour and innate refinement and purity of purpose as if she had known him twenty years, and equally as sure that there was friendship between them deep rooted in mutual understanding, a oneness of aim and ideal, and an honest good-will.

To this point the tide of events had carried Evelyn this morning, when, in obedience to an impulse which owed its birth to the one jarring note in their companionship—the limitation of her power of independent action—she had told him of her intention to take up special work of her own.

The plan she had in her mind was a practical one, which

she was sure of carrying through. She had discussed it with her mother, who, after some protests, had given her consent, and this morning on her way to the office Evelyn had felt a naughty relish in the thought of Mr. Glynn's surprise when he found that he was not able, this time, to get his own way in the Nile.

Then the battle was fought and won, the enemy accepting his defeat with unexpected meekness, and leaving her literally in possession of the field. He had yielded, too, in the best way, by wishing her success. What more could she desire? Surely nothing.

Yet as Evelyn looked round the quiet, empty room, and realised that by her curt refusal to discuss her plan with Mr. Glynn she was committed to carrying it out alone, she felt what a month ago she would have scoffed at with scorn too deep for words—a sense of oppression at the weight of the task which a few hours since had seemed so light; and a wave of self-distrust overcame her which amounted to positive physical pain.

Once, twice, she was within an ace of calling to him and telling him all about it. But pride forbade.

Had he ever come to her in his anxieties and uncertainties about Nyne? Even now she knew well that he had not told her all he feared this man might do, nor had he given even the barest indication of what he intended to do to Nyne if he again showed fight.

Then had she not vowed to herself that this man, with all his power, should never rule out her independence of action or control the work of her office? Now the time had come when she must put this to the proof. It would be a shameful confession of weakness to seek help now. It was out of the question.

Having settled this matter, Evelyn began to write her letters. But they would not be written. Instead, she rehearsed the points she would have discussed with him if she had not decided to keep her own counsel. . At last, losing part of the thread of her resolution, she resolved that if an emergency arose, why, she would go to him about all these

matters at once. The result of this reflection soothed her, her mind recovered cheerfulness and balance, and she went to work at her correspondence with a will.

It did not occur to Evelyn that this very reservation proved that the surrender of her independence was already an accomplished fact.

CHAPTER XXIX

AN IRISH QUESTION

JOHN went out early, and returned to the office, after paying all necessary visits, at half-past three. By four his work for the day was finished, but he had no intention of going home. The secretary was to be back at 5.30, and he must meet her there to report progress. As a matter of fact there was nothing particular to report, but that did not make it the less necessary that they should meet.

John was perfectly aware that by this daily, almost hourly, contact with Evelyn he was on dangerous ground for himself. That any danger could exist for her he had not conceived, nor would he be likely to do so unless his eyes were rudely opened. And as for himself, well, his position and his duty were clear and straightforward. Officially he was a worker in her office, and now a member of her committee. They were friends, but their connection with one another was solely official, and the chief subject of their conversation was the scheme in which they had agreed Dick was to take a leading part. It was true that presently the time would arrive when this connection, purely official though it was, would come to an end. It had been formed for Dick's sake, it existed only for Dick's sake, and when it had served Dick's purpose to the full it must cease. Already John had made inquiries about the piece of land in his native place—Yorkshire. It was his intention ultimately to buy a small estate and settle down there. But at present his duty lay in the Nile, where he could best serve the friend who had saved his life, and for whose sake he had come there first of all. There were other reasons, of course. He was keenly interested in the work of the Society. He was still more interested in the Nile, and the people of the Nile. Finally,

there was Percival Nyne; and in some ways this man interested him most of all. Nyne alone made it imperative that he should remain in Relton yet awhile. Until by some means "the Snag" was removed, the navigation of the vessel could not be left to Dick alone. The whole business was exceedingly simple. Certainly he loved her, but this was a mere incident, and of no importance except to himself. No one knew it, or should ever know it. By-and-by he would be separated from her altogether, and Dick would win her; and he, John, would be "best man" at the wedding, and the curtain would ring down.

Such, at least, was the way in which the situation presented itself to John's mind now. It must be remembered that since his manhood came to him he had lived in a country where women scarcely exist in a practical sense for the man who is always at work, where "society" is not, and where life is very simple indeed, perhaps because death is always near.

It was a wet day. Rain had been falling all the afternoon, and no one was about in the streets but those whom business compelled to be there. In these circumstances, when John, gazing idly out of the window, considering whether he should or should not pay a visit to Tom Symes, saw a man leaning against one of the iron gates of the church gardens opposite, he wondered what he was doing there, and when, at a second glance, he saw him crane his head forward right and left, as if watching the street, and then stare directly at the office, he became attentive and curious. After a third glance, he caught up his hat and crossed the road with long strides.

"Malony!" he cried. "So I have found you at last."

The Irishman grinned feebly, and thrust out a limp, wet hand. He was but a dim reflection, now, of the Malony of Clerkenwell Close. All the former authority and confidence of his bearing had been washed out as if by the rain. His lanky figure was bent and slouching; his clothes were worn and dirty almost beyond recognition; and, worst sign of all, his one eye—the steadiness and keenness of which had at-

tracted John in the first instance, and had been the chief cause of his prompt confidence in the man—was now shifty and bloodshot.

"You are in trouble, man. What has happened?"

John spoke sharply, and in a tone which might mean anything; but as he spoke, he kept his hold of the cold fingers with a close, friendly grip, upon which Malony straightened himself, and met the question, and the look that accompanied it, with a steady composure.

"Trouble, ye say," he said wearily—and John now noticed that his face was haggard with want of sleep and food—"aye, I'm in trouble, up to me eyes, and soon be like to be drowned altogether in ut. But peace to that. If once I blather of myself I'll go clapping on like a chapel bell. I want a word with ye about something that's important. Come behind them trees in the gardens, where we'll not be seen from the street."

"Why not indoors? We can't talk here in the rain."

Malony shook his head.

"I'll not be coming in. Anything but that. Whisht! I must tell you the truth, I see. I am expecting every moment to be took. The 'tecs must have been searching for me this three days past. I won't be took in your office. Come to the trees. There's one."

He started, and jerked his head nervously at a figure on the other side of Critchett Place. It was a policeman in uniform.

"That man is after his tea," John said, with a comfortable laugh, as the constable passed them with that look of intense preoccupation affected by policemen off duty when they recognise an acquaintance.

"Come, my friend," he added, slipping his hand under the Irishman's arm. "I will not have this nonsense. You are coming to our office to get dry and to drink a cup of tea, and though all the 'tecs in London hammer at that door, they shall not get you until we have filled up the locker and put your wardrobe to rights."

Malony protested again, but with feebleness, and in five

minutes was in the private room, before a big fire, which John proceeded to poke into a roaring blaze.

"Now get in front of that, while I see what rig we have in the store cupboard," he said cheerily. "No," as Malony made an attempt to speak, "I am not going to do any business whatever with a man in your fix. I have to ask your advice, and perhaps more than that, and I shall need you for an hour at least. So hold your tongue, deputy, and do what you are told."

Malony laughed a quavering, childish laugh, and rubbed his eyes furtively with his sleeve.

"Bedad, you'll make a fair baby of me, Mr. Glynn, trating me like a gentleman born, and making me free of the house, and me worse than a common thief—worse, I say."

He spoke jerkily, and in an excited, breathless tone, as if he had been drinking. But John, who knew the kind of a man he was dealing with, was not deceived for an instant.

"I do not care a cuss what you are," he answered, wheeling round, with an armful of clothes, to lay the other hand upon the man's shoulder. "Do you think I have forgotten what you risked for me that night in the Close, and the invaluable information that you gave me afterwards? It was not money or self-interest which made you do that; it was friendship. And now, if I have a chance to pay you back in the same coin, I shall do it. Look through these things. They were all built for a man about your size. Pick what fits you best, and change into them, while I order tea; and don't waste time, now. We shall have enough to do to get through as it is."

And then, tossing the clothes he held into Malony's arms, he abruptly left the room, and went down to see the caretaker. He was away fifteen minutes, and then returned bearing a tray full of good things, followed at a short interval by the woman with a large pot of tea. There were cups for two, and John sipped one for company's sake, while Malony, with an appetite he vainly endeavoured to restrain, devoured cold beef and potatoes, new bread and butter, and hot muffins.

The Irishman, now clad in a grey suit—an old one of Dick's—fortified and sustained by the first proper meal he had taken for days, looked and felt a different person. His face was still haggard and careworn, but the hunted look had gone, and his eye, albeit suspiciously moist at the corners, was as bright and steady as of old. He held his head erect, and was a man again.

"Now," John said, the things having been cleared away, "we will do our business with a will, and hear all each other's news. Let me begin."

He then told of his interview with Nyne, and its result.

"You see, now, how the matter stands between us," he added. "I have no doubt myself that he will refuse, and try to remove me in a different way altogether—by preference, cutting my throat in the Warren on a dark night. But of that later. My anxiety, and the business I shall ask for your help over, is about some one else—a lady—who has been indirectly threatened with violence already, and will be an easier mark than I am. Her name——"

But here Malony, whose face had been twitching with excitement for some moments, could remain quiet no longer.

"Begorra, I can tell you her name—Miss Evelyn Grey, the secretary of the Organisation. Now it was just about that, on me soul, I came here to-day to catch you if I could unbeknownst to her, and give you full warning. Mr. Glynn, sir"—and his tone trembled in its earnestness—"the ould spalpeen is after her, trackin' her here, there, and everywhere. Not himself, ye understand, nor by men who might be noticed—for your Mr. Giles, I hear, has put every constable and plain-clothes man in the district on the alert—but by women, the worst trackers av all. What he will be after doing, Lord knows. But it will be bad; worse than any honest man can turn his tongue to describe. That, just, is the message I had for yer before I went my way. And thanks be to God, sir, I've found ye. Watch her yourself, Mr. Glynn, and protect her, or, as there's a sun in Heaven, harm will befall her pretty face, and a deadly, damnable outrage be done in the Nile."

He paused for breath, and in his excitement clutched John's arm. And then his lips parted with a grin, for he saw an expression come into the eyes of his companion that gave him consolation and great joy.

"Thanks," John said, speaking very slowly. "Who told you?"

"Billy the fake, whose life ye saved with mine that night at the Close. Ye can depend on him. He's as honest a little thief as I've seen, and as he's Nyne's picked clye-faking wire, he knows."

"Ah!" and John absently took up the poker, and balanced it between his right finger and thumb. "Shall you see him soon?"

Malony sighed.

"Devil a bit will I be seeing any one of 'em again, belike, except from the dock. But I'll get ye to him. D'ye want him, then?"

He was chuckling very quietly to himself all the time, watching John's eye.

"I should like his master to know from one of his own men that if harm should ever come to her"—here John lowered his voice unconsciously, and Malony had to bend forward to catch the last word—"if she is ever hurt, or harmed in the very least, his life will pay for it, though he hides for twenty years."

Malony nodded with satisfaction.

"Nyne shall be told, and if he could only see your face, bedad, as I have seen it now, Miss Grey, the darlin', would be safe even from him for evermore."

"She will be safe as it is," John said, in his natural voice. "You and I will see to that. What do you say to working for me on business terms?"

He smiled, and held out his hand.

Malony seized and wrung it, then flung it away, with a groan.

"What am I doing, at all? If I were free, oh, if I were free! But ye forget what I said at the start. See, let me tell ye, then."

He had dropped his face on his hands, resting his forehead on the mantelpiece, and now, as he turned round, John saw that the hunted, furtive look of misery had returned.

He laid his arm tenderly across the bent shoulders.

"Tell me," he said softly, "all you can, but tell me as a friend."

Malony hid his face again, and John felt the shoulder under his hand tremble. Then the Irishman pulled himself together, and turned to face his listener.

"I am a thief, I said," he began, "and now, if Percival Nyne is the man I have known him to be the years I have served him, I am as good as caught. When I am took, I'll go across the sea to Cork, where I was born, to be tried for embezzling two hundred pounds."

"How long ago did you do it?"

"A matter of two years."

"Anything before?"

"Not a thing."

"Or since?"

"Devil a bit, sir; but what's the odds, in that I'm a thief who has never been punished. They issued a warrant, av course, and a warrant runs if it is twenty years afterwards."

John nodded, a trifle absently.

"And who were the people? Tell me the whole if you do not mind, friend."

"Mind, indeed!" the Irishman cried. "There's nothing I would rather be doing. 'Twas the firm I worked for, Cambray & Sullivan, builders, of Cork City. Twenty years I'd been in their employ, and me father before me. I was foreman—principal foreman, ye'll understand—paying wages to more than a hundred men. Money was always in me hands, and no more account took than if the young master himself were handling it. And that was me ruin, in a fashion. My father and his, you should know, were both labourers wanst, and though ould Micky Cambray had the fingers that hould cash, and my dad the hands that spend it, they never parted company as friends, and the son and me

were like brothers. So I felt in a sense as if I had a share in the business, and looked on the cash—as I looked at the work—as my own. And I worked; oh, I worked for them, hard; and business was good, and I married my Bridget, and ould Cambray himself it was who gave her away. And for years all went well—but myself. But I took to the turf and to betting, and as the devil would have it, I had wonderful luck at the first. Then it turned, and I'd nothing but debts, and no money to pay 'em. You can guess what came about next. I used their money, and twice got it back and no harm. I did it the third time. The horse went amuck, and threw his jockey and me. Even then, if I had gone to the ould man and made a clean breast, belike I'd have been forgiven for ould sake's sake, and though I must have left them, they would have let me have time to pay. But they had a new partner in one Pat Sullivan, whom I could never abide. He hated me, and I paid him the same compliment; and when I knew the worst, a could terror crept on me, and I left that night for Liverpool, thinking to make a home for Biddy and the colleens in Ameriky. It was a coward's trick, and put the Almighty dead against me—small blame to Him! I could not get work, and at last drifted to London, penniless, homeless, with naught but the clothes on my back. Then I fell in with Nyne. It was through an advertisement he'd put in, and when I answered it, though I saw he was worse than a thief, I was glad to take what he offered me. He saw that I was in trouble, and one night, by twist and turn, this way and that, got the truth out of me. Since then he's held me by the neck, and never wanst—not wanst—all these two years, have I set eyes on the wife or the girls. My God! my God! but it has been a living hell."

He choked, buried his face in his hands, and then, overcome by many sleepless nights, and days of bitter suspense, and the reaction caused by John's sympathy, he broke down and sobbed like a child.

John did not try to comfort him then; but when Malony recovered, and wiped his eyes, with a broken apology, he said in a quiet tone:

"You told me you had not been punished. That seems hardly true. But tell me, you have heard of your family."

"Biddy has writ wanst a week since I left her, and ye'll understand, av course, that I have had the money to send her. Nyne shall have his due. He paid me well. He knew it was best for him. They've never wanted at home; but they could never come here; I could never let them; and if I left to visit them—that is what he has held at my head always—without his consent, he'd telegraph to Cork to have me hunted down. There was one other condition, too. I was never, for any circumstance whatever, to betray a secret av his to a sowl. That's the whole of it, but just what you may guess. He found by some means that you and I had been friendly together over the boy Joe, and I found he knew it the day you fought the eighty-one-tonner. So I left him that minute, and since have dodged here, there, and all over. I thought at first I would go to Ameriky, having saved a bit of money. But thin I thought no. I am too old for a new country, and I am tired out and beat down. So I sent what I had to Biddy, and towld her all was over, for that I should give myself up. I had meant to, last night, and the night before that, but the fear of it all came on me again, and I kept away. Wanst I thought of the river. But that's too cowardly even for me. Then I came across Billy, and when he towld me of Nyne's lay for Miss Grey, I felt I must see you. Now that's done, and well done, and I have conquered the fear of it, and I gives myself up to-night."

His voice was quite steady now, and his manner quiet, with a curious touch of dignity in it, though he looked very white and worn out.

He crossed the room to pick up his cap, but he never reached it, for John met him half-way, and took him by the shoulders.

At this moment some one came into the outer room and peeped through the folding doors. It was Evelyn. She had entered at the basement door, and left her umbrella and cloak with the caretaker. Neither of the men heard her. She stood behind the folding doors, uncertain what to do.

"Where are you going now?" John said, holding the Irishman fast, and looking into his face with a smile Malony could not understand.

"Where, indade, but the station?" was the weary answer. "Kingsland Road, I reckon, is the nearest."

"You will do no such thing," John said. "If you give yourself up at all it shall be in Cork, after I have interviewed Mr. Cambray, and you have seen the wife and colleens. We start for Ireland by the first boat we can get to-night."

Malony's jaw fell, and became tense and rigid.

"Cork!" he gasped; "Ireland! Have ye heard, or are you mocking me? Or is it that I am going mad? That must be it. Oh, my head!"

He reeled with the shock, and John had to put his arm about him and lead him to a chair.

"Steady yourself," he said gruffly, fearing that he had spoken too suddenly. "Be a man now. We have no time to lose, you and I."

Malony was sitting back, with closed eyes. Now he opened them, and feebly held out his hand.

"I'll be right in a tick," he whispered, "but my head is just on the spin. Go on; tell me again, what do you mean to do in Cork?"

"See Mr. Cambray," John replied, in as matter-of-fact a tone as possible, "appeal to him as your old friend, and offer him, on your behalf, £200 cash down to square accounts."

"But the warrant," murmured Malony feebly, though his eyes were now aglow, and hot tears of thankfulness were streaming down his face—"if that is running——"

"I do not believe in that warrant," John said. "I don't believe they have been to the police at all. You would have been traced, if they had, by your wife's letters. Any way, you must face the music, friend, and in less than twenty-four hours, if we have luck, we shall know what we have to expect. Now I must get a Bradshaw, and hunt for trains."

He turned abruptly away, hoping to evade the transports

which he saw gathering in the Irishman's eye. But Malony now fairly threw himself upon his benefactor, and caught him in his arms.

"What will I say to ye? What will I do for this? Mr. Glynn, best man and friend I ever had, if you have ever known what it is to be dyin', and leaving your dearest behind, and then hear a call back to life, you'll know what I'm feeling; or if ever you feel—God grant you never will—that you've broke the heart of the woman you love better than life, and then, all suddent, find you will save her, then you will realise what ye have done for me. But I can find no words to thank you with, and I'm sure I want none. It's deeds I'm after." He drew himself up. "Deeds, me friend. There's Nyne, now. When I come back, I'll hunt and track him as he never was hunted yet, and if he comes within a hundred miles of molesting your lady here, I'll take care there's not a bone in his body worth holding an inquest on. She will be safe until the day, the day——" Here he laughed, a wild Irish laugh. "Sure, Mr. Glynn, if I make too bould you'll forgive me, but I'm after thinking a day will come when Bridget, my wife, will do you service. By your eyes when I towld of the danger from Nyne, I saw what Miss Grey was to you. Bedad, sir, then when the banns are up, and the ring is bought, it's my Biddy, the finest needlewoman in Ireland, though I say it myself, shall be the one, with the best of her skill, and all as a labour of love, to make the wedding gown."

CHAPTER XXX

A DISTRICT NURSE

WHEN John went to get the railway guide no one was in the other room. Nor did he see Evelyn that evening, though he waited an hour for her return.

A boat was caught in the small hours, and the evening of the following day Malony's fate was decided. Matters stood as John had expected. No warrant had ever been issued at all, though, through the influence of the new partner, Malony had never been told of this. John found that he had a very easy task with the firm, and the next morning Pat himself, with a rigid face and a quaking heart and bank notes for £200 in his pocket, marched through the old counting-house he had known since childhood to meet the man he had wronged alone in the partners' room.

The next morning at daybreak they were on their way back again, and as John paced the deck of the little packet with the doss-house deputy, whom he had now engaged as his confidential man in all things appertaining to the Nile, and who he intended should be the caretaker and manager of the prospective institute, he felt that he had done well. Evelyn, with Malony and Giles to guard her, would be safe in the Nile.

He was not long in discovering the work she had taken up, though he little imagined what the first practical result of it was going to be as far as he was concerned. It was Giles who solved the mystery, for certain things Evelyn herself let drop caused the wily old policeman to waylay, accidentally, Dr. Stansfield in the street, and by deft questions extract the information that Miss Grey was nursing for him four afternoons a week. Some further pressure, delicately but firmly administered, drew from the little doctor the

emphatic guarantee that she should never be allowed to visit places where she would be in any danger.

Yet Giles was not easy in his mind.

"You mark my words, sir," he said, "there is more in it than we thinks. Miss Grey don't go messing round with our little doctor as she does, putting on bandages and dressing and washing the heads of them dirty children and all the rest, without a purpose behind far bigger than just to become a bit knowing about wounds and such like. There's some ladies I know—in our Society, too—who are well content to fuss about Jimmy this and Johnny and Moll in a 'scientific way,' as they call it, and to pass their days advising and cosseting and reproving people who would be a sight better off left alone, even if they *was* dirty and *always* kept their windows shut and did *not* turn the bedclothes down, and one or two of 'em died in consequence. This here friendly visiting, to my mind—the way it is done—is a great curse. It do make the people lean so on others. But I tell you, sir, that is not Miss Grey's lay at all. She has a card or two up her sleeve that will surprise you and me when she plays 'em. I only hope it won't surprise her. But you have spoken the truth; we can't interfere. And I likes her independent ways of acting. Bless her! It do show me a lot, it do, a lot!"

And thereupon Giles, for no obvious reason whatever, chuckled so violently that he choked himself, and had to make free and sonorous use of his bandana handkerchief before he recovered.

It was at this time that an answer came from Nyne to John's offer. It was in the form of a letter directed to John's Hampstead address, at which Giles, when he saw it, whistled long and loud. "Sir," the letter ran, "I have carefully considered your proposal to buy my property in Relton, and regret that I do not see my way, at present, to entertain it.—I am, yours faithfully, Percival Nyne."

"That's off then," John said, screwing up the letter and throwing it into the waste-paper basket.

"Is it, though?" Giles exclaimed, rescuing the letter,

smoothing it out carefully. "I am not so sure. Anyway, sir, if you please, I'll keep that bit of paper. I always like to have these blokes' signatures in my possession. Who knows but it may be useful some day to have the old joker's handwriting." With which remark he put the letter away in his pocket-book.

The next day John received another letter of very different import—an invitation to dinner from Lady Wendover. It came to the office, and Evelyn watched his face as he read it.

"You are going, I hope," she said. "I was instructed to apply all possible pressure, and to Mr. Brabant too."

John laughed.

"Mr. Brabant will not need much. As for myself, it is very kind of her ladyship, but a dinner-party frightens me. Are you going?"

He asked the question with a curtness that reminded her of the first days of their acquaintance.

"Yes," she answered, studying a letter upside down, "if I can leave my mother."

"I should much like to meet your mother——" he began, then stopped. He knew he had not the least business to say such a thing, and added, hastily, "Mr. Brabant has so often spoken of her."

Evelyn looked up with a bright smile.

"My mother will be very glad to meet you. Needless to remark, she has heard of you. Indeed, if well enough, she will be at the dinner. My aunt has invited us both."

"Then I will certainly come—under your protection," he added, lightly.

"You mean Mr. Brabant's," she corrected. "I only give mine in the Nile."

He wondered what she meant by this, and pondered over the problem half the morning, but he could make nothing of it. Truly he was "scouting in a strange country," as he had once told Giles, a state of things which sometimes is a dangerous thing for the country.

The same afternoon Evelyn called at the office to get some

papers, and was rummaging about in her desk for them when there came a sharp rat-tat at the door. She opened it herself, thinking it was a telegram, and found Patrick Malony on the step.

Pat was now the pink of respectability. He doffed his hat with a flourish and the broadest of Irish grins, at which Evelyn must needs suddenly blush, when she would have given a fortune to have done nothing of the kind.

"A foine afternoon, miss. Mr. Glynn, now, is he in?" He made the inquiry anxiously, after having taken especial pains to watch John out of the office before he approached it.

"He is not? Sure, thin, I must ask you to trouble to see me yourself. It's a matter of consequence, and consarns that ould master of mine, Percival Nyne. Could you spare me a minute?"

"Please come in," Evelyn answered, leading the way into her room. "I have an appointment with Dr. Stansfield, but it must wait. Has anything happened?"

Malony sat down and placed his hat between his knees. "I may say yes and no to that," he replied evasively. "But, first, whatever I say and tell, you must promise me, miss, not to repeat to Mr. Glynn. If I have not your word for this I can tell you nothing at all."

Evelyn frowned, though not at Malony.

"You place me in an awkward position. Does the matter concern me?"

"Not the least in the world," the Irishman answered calmly. "It is all between Nyne and Mr. Glynn, them two alone."

"Then you must not think of telling me," Evelyn said; but her voice lacked conviction.

"Ah, well, it is for you to decide, miss," Malony rejoined with a sigh, pretending to make a move to depart. "But I could not be aisy in my mind till I'd seen ye. I thought as you knew the guv'nor and his feelings toward Mr. Glynn, and the danger—But, indade, why should I trouble a lady? No, it is out of my place; I must leave it until I can see Mr. Glynn."

He rose in good earnest now, though very slowly. But when Evelyn replied, he dropped back into his chair again.

"Of course if there is anything I can do, you must tell me at once. I will not betray your confidence."

Malony looked at her with respectful admiration. There was not a shade of self-consciousness in her face now. It was quiet and calm, her eyes steady, her mouth firm as a rock.

"I believe you," he said, with the bluntness which from men of his class is the truest compliment when they address a lady. "Then understand, miss, we have all been thinking wrong. But I forgot," seeing a look of perplexity in her eyes, "you don't know rightly at all what we have thought. Sure then I must go deeper, though, belike, I am going a bit too deep. It is this way. I had information which I gave to Mr. Glynn, though he'll not have told you, that old skull-face was planning revenge on you for what he had suffered. I find now it's a fake to lead us up a blind alley—a trap for Mr. Glynn. Now you may say, what av that? Warn Mr. Glynn and all's well. But it will not be well, just because Mr. Glynn's Mr. Glynn. I'll warn him indade. But what will he do?—just laugh and go his way. He'll take no care of himself at all, and when I say, which is the truth, that the Warren is where the trap's laid, and that never again while Nyne lives must he go into that hell-hole, why, bedad, miss, the man will take no more note of my words than he would of a puff of wind, and if any call comes from the Warren for him, down he will go there into the worst av it, and, on my sowl, he will never come out alive. It's the fear in me of his want of fear that has brought me to you. But you'll not tell him? You've promised that." Malony was in deadly earnest now. His face looked grey and troubled, and his lips trembled.

"I have promised," Evelyn said. "Now, what do you wish me to do?"

Malony gave an expressive gesture. "Sure, whatever comes to your mind to do. You are a lady, I judge, with courage and wit of the best, and such have quicker minds

than men, belike. Even if you can do nothing we are no worse off than before. But I'll tell ye what put it into my head to come to you. I heard tell you was nursing in Relton. Now there's many a house a nurse finds her way into that no one else may get near, and if so be you are ever in the Warren you might succeed in finding out what would put us on the track to roast the old spalpeen on his own spit. But I must be moving, I am taking your time, and if Mr. Glynn were to come—whisht! there he is now. Where'll I hide just?"

There was the sound of a latchkey in the front door.

"It is Giles," Evelyn said. "You have told him of course."

Malony gave his head an emphatic shake and closed the folding doors.

"I am glad you said that. Now let me tell you something and then get off by the back way. Mr. Giles is the best of men, and me very great friend. But in this business you must walk carefully with him. He has a friend in the police —not the Superintendent, he's safe, but a sergeant, and I hear that all Mr. Giles says to him leaks out to a superior officer, who is taking it direct to Nyne. There is collusion, belike, between the ould divil and them. So, whatever you do, Miss Grey, I pray of ye this, breathe no word of it ever to Giles or to any one sowl of them all. But if any idea comes to ye, and you want me, I'll be ready to serve ye by day or night. Whisht—I am off then."

He bowed to Evelyn, went swiftly to the door in the passage and slipped through it without a sound just before Giles, who had now reached the outer room, opened the folding doors.

Evelyn was late for her appointment with Dr. Stansfield, and found him a little snappish in consequence. But he was not hard to appease. The little doctor was, indeed, having a very good time of it.

The work of a general practitioner in a poor district of London twenty years ago, if he were a man seriously bent upon doing more than making a living out of his patients, was very difficult and arduous.

What people do not understand when they talk glibly about the social and physical degeneration of the toiling millions of London is that a large percentage—an overwhelmingly large percentage—of the worst ills from which those suffer, among whom disease and crime are most manifest, comes from the apathetic ignorance on their own part of the first principles of self-help, self-control, and too often self-respect.

Let the Socialist, if he will, blame society at large for this; let ladies and gentlemen on Guardian Board and Borough Council, who desire popularity, propound to sympathetic audiences of non-ratepayers the curious principle that if a child goes barefoot to school because its mother has pawned its boots for drink, the State should provide new boots because it compels the child to be educated, but, for the sake of the child, do not let any one blind himself to the fact that the salvation, physical as well as moral, for the very poor of our great cities, can only come in any real sense when they learn how to help themselves.

Dr. Stansfield was a Socialist in theory, but being a doctor by profession, and a scientific man by training, he found in practice that for one woman who needed material aid to give her children a better chance in life, there were a hundred who needed more common-sense, a rudimentary knowledge of domestic economy, and a little skill in plain cooking.

Again and again he diagnosed and prescribed for a child only to see the little patient droop and die just for the want of these qualities and knowledge on the part of the real head of the house—the mother.

It was, therefore, a godsend to the little man when Evelyn, who had learnt cooking from her mother's old servant, and who had picked up an elementary knowledge of bandaging and dressing wounds, and was thoroughly accustomed to dealing tactfully with poor people, offered her services as helper and nurse four afternoons a week on the understanding that in return she should receive such further training as he could give her.

It was hard work, and from the first Evelyn was set to do what was almost beyond her powers. For twenty years ago the present Nursing Associations, which send skilled nurses daily to almost every part of London, existed to a very limited extent, and many a critical surgical case, or that of a woman after a bad confinement, was given to Evelyn to nurse, which nowadays would be in hospital or infirmary, or would be attended to by a lady with many certificates.

Besides nursing, there was cooking to be done on the most hopeless of open grates, rough hands to be taught gentleness, and coarse natures unselfishness, if the poor little rickety child of a rude working mother was ever to benefit by Dr. Stansfield's tonics and cod-liver oil.

Such were the duties, with many others, that Evelyn had begun in the Nile when Malony's news came.

As Giles predicted, Evelyn had a purpose in her work far beyond becoming sufficiently skilled to help a few families to better things; it was her intention to form a corps of helpers out of the Institute girls and women when, through the Institute, she could get naturally and easily into touch with them. She knew how devoted the poor are to one another; and it was her belief that if only means could be found to teach the poor to help the poor intelligently and wisely, as well as generously, a greater work could be done in the improvement of their condition than by the establishment of any number of nursing centres for ladies.

Upon Malony's news, however, the whole current of Evelyn's thoughts was forced back into the present. There was danger in the air, immediate and serious. If it were to be averted, action must be taken, and at once. It would be delightful to protect Mr. Glynn, and some day, some time, when all danger was over, he should know that a woman had been called to avert evil from the head of the strong and puissant "champion of the Nile."

But the pleasure of this thought quickly passed. It was one thing to be told that she was needed, quite another to know how to supply the need. Crises, however, stimulate determined people, and before Evelyn had reached Dr.

Stansfield's dispensary in the New North Road, she had made up her mind what she was going to do.

"I have decided to take up some nursing in the Warren," she said to the doctor. "I know you have patients there. I want you, please, to send me to look after them."

Dr. Stansfield looked aghast.

"It is not to be thought of," he cried. "Why, I promised —that is, it is out of the question. I would not send my worst enemy to that place, unless she were old as Methuselah or ugly as Mrs. Prickett. Come, come, you must not think of such a thing."

Evelyn looked at him and folded her hands meekly in her lap.

"Very well," she said. "If you can't send me where I want to go, I will not go where you send me. I am very sorry. I should have liked to help you, but it will be impossible for the future, so good-bye."

She curtsied and formally held out her hand. But the doctor would not see it.

"Sit down, sit down, sit down!" he cried excitedly. "We will talk about it. Tell me, first of all, why have you taken such a ridiculous idea into your head?"

Evelyn shook her head.

"I will neither sit down nor tell you anything unless you promise, in the most binding manner, to let me do exactly as I please. You will in the end, you know, because you must see that I shall go whether you give me patients or not."

"No woman who is young can possibly go there," the doctor said, frowning, "unless she is rigged up as a Catholic Sister of Mercy, or as a nurse—bonnet, cloak, gown, and cuffs."

"Bonnet, cloak, frock, and cuffs," Evelyn repeated, ticking them off on her fingers. "I will get every one; quite nice things, too, except cuffs. Now, what else?"

"She must be prepared to hear the vilest language, deal with men and women in delirium tremens, and carry her life in her hand if the lads are on the drink, while if they start

fighting, she'll have to stay huddled away in some room, which will smell most abominably, until they have finished—all night, say."

"That will be nasty, but rather exciting. I will carry a life preserver."

"Better carry a pistol," he rejoined grimly. "But are you really in earnest? I'll tell the Committee, mind."

Evelyn compressed her lips to keep cool. This was the critical moment.

"If you do," she said, "I cannot go."

"Ah," cried the doctor triumphantly, "that is what I thought."

"Exactly," Evelyn said; "but, as it happens, the Committee does not know that I am nursing for you. They would disapprove of that nearly as much. Now, doctor, I want to make a bargain with you. I will promise to give two days a week to any of your people outside the Warren if you will send me inside the other two days. I will take all precautions. I will obey all your instructions; I will be exceedingly careful. Will you agree? And, tell nobody—not even Giles, Mr. Glynn, or any one who knows me—what we are doing. You are the only man who can help me. If you fail me, I fail altogether. Please help me."

The little doctor mopped his forehead. "I don't like it. Of course there is no real harm; they never touch a nurse if she is careful; but you are too—young, still you are a strong, tall woman, and I have need of you, and you have the qualities. Well, then,—well—I will do it. There!"

They shook hands.

"Thank you. I will begin to-morrow at three o'clock."

"That is absolutely impossible," he protested; "there are your things to be got; you must be in uniform, and I should wear spectacles, goggles."

"I will get them to-night."

"But—but—but I have no patients for you. I have to arrange and think about that. Next week."

Evelyn sat down again.

"I will wait gladly while you think."

Dr. Stansfield laughed till he cried at the idea. But he was vanquished, and knew it. "Well, well, well," he said faintly, wiping his eyes, "call for me here, *dressed*, at half-past two to-morrow afternoon and we will go together."

CHAPTER XXXI

CALM

Joe and Amy were made man and wife. Mr. Merwell married them at St. Margaret's early on Saturday morning, Joe having secured the half day off for the purpose. John gave the bride away, and Tom Symes, resplendent in a new silk hat and a frock coat of enormous dimensions, and a button-hole that would have made a respectable cauliflower, acted, quite against all conventions, as Joe's best man. A cab was waiting at the church door, and the young couple departed for their wedding tour—an excursion to Epping Forest, as the day was fine, and warm for December—returning that night to their new home—two rooms in Alma Street, New North Road. It was not far from the Nile, though just without the pale, and on Sunday afternoon they dined, by invitation, with the Symeses, and in the afternoon, while Joe and Tom—who had become close friends—went for a walk to Hampstead, Amy and Mrs. Symes settled comfortably down for a long gossip by the fire.

Four weeks had passed since the great fight. During the first part of this time Amy had been confined to the house, then away at the convalescent home, and for the last few days before her marriage, engrossed with her own affairs. She was anxious for news of the Nile. Mrs. Symes, for her part, was as eager to tell it as Amy to hear.

"No," she said, in answer to Amy's first question, "nothing, you may say, has happened; but something will, before a week has gone, and that the worst; and I've been keeping it all to tell you, as soon as we could meet, for something must be done, and quick, too, or there'll be murder, just as I have always said there would."

Mrs. Symes smoothed her black silk Sunday dress with grim complacency.

She was as anxious as Amy herself that no harm should come to John, and yielded to none in her personal detestation of Percival Nyne; but she was one of those persons, to be found in all grades of society, who invariably prophesy evil, and take strange pleasure in the process. Amy, however, having no inclination of the kind, would have liked to scratch Mrs. Symes.

"You have put Mr. Glynn on his guard, I suppose, and Miss Grey and all?"

Mrs. Symes gave a grunt of contempt.

"What is the good of that? I tells Tom that I knows something is brewing in the Warren, and that he must see Alfred Giles, and he does, but all Giles says is, that he will put the police on the watch. As if the police was any good in the Warren! And Mr. Glynn, when he's told not to go near the Court, laughs, and says he has kept his skin whole in worse places, and guesses he'll worry through somehow. The only sensible one of the lot is Miss Grey. She knows some nurse, seemingly, who has started work in the Warren for Dr. Stansfield, and says she will get her to question the women there. They'll know when the job is to be, if any one do. But I feel sure that this time the guv'nor will get his own back; I feel it in my bones. I would not be Mr. Glynn, not for all his money. He'll come to a bad end."

Amy bit her lip to refrain from sharp words. But she was fond, now, of this woman, who had been a kind friend to her, and succeeded in controlling herself.

"You said, when you started, something must be done quick."

"Ah, that is by you," Mrs. Symes answered. "Go and see Miss Grey to-morrow morning, and tell her what your aunty, Mrs. Prickett, has told me."

"But she don't tell the truth."

"Do not be too sure. The woman has been a-drinking gin something shameful of late, and you know how she dribbles out secrets when she's full."

"The guv'nor will take care to keep her in the dark."

Mrs. Symes laughed.

"He may, and then again he may not. She knows her way about, does aunty, and she has her nose in the Warren. I found this out only yesterday, for I see her sneaking from there just as the lamps was being lit, and being curious, I up and spoke to her myself. 'Oh, ho! Mrs. Prickett, ma'am,' I says to her, 'and what might yer be doing in that place of a evening?' My stars, you should have seen her jump! I thought she'd have fell. But a lamp-post saved her, and then I saw she were three parts gone; and then, without a word more, she spits at me, and begins calling me every name she could set her tongue to, and my man too, and all in a whisper, like air oozing from a india-rubber bottle. It was not nice. But I stands it for what might come, and, after a minute, something did come; for having no more breath, she shakes her fist and whispers, 'You smiles, do yer?'—I was smiling my best, to aggravate her—'you'll not smile after Monday you ——!' And then she starts calling me again. 'Oh, Monday, is it?' I sez, laughing. 'I'll come up here and see the fun, Monday.' 'If you do,' she answers, shaking and grinning, 'there'll be nothing left of yer to go home again,' and with that she made off, chuckle, chuckle, chuckle, like a hen under a coop."

Amy duly informed Evelyn of the circumstance, and she told John. But Monday came and passed, and nothing happened; no summons, even of the most indirect kind, came from the Warren. Mrs. Symes was obliged to confess herself mistaken.

In the minds of nearly all concerned, uneasiness and anxiety disturbed their rest at night and their tempers by day. Mr. and Mrs. Symes talked of little else, and fell out over it grievously. Giles lost his geniality, and went about his work with a clouded brow. Even Joe and Amy had sharp words once, because Joe, in spite of anything his wife could say, persisted in his belief that Mr. Glynn would "be upsides with 'em all."

John himself, and Evelyn, were the only people who took a hopeful view of the situation.

John was cheerful, so he told Giles, because he failed to see how Nyne could take his revenge without being hoist by his own petard. But he had another reason, which he did not tell Giles, namely, the private information of Malony that Nyne was not really aiming at Evelyn at all, but was engaged in laying a trap for him only. Not that John was indifferent to his own danger as he appeared to be to Malony and to Evelyn herself. Men who have known real danger seldom are. He did not look complacently upon the thought of being kicked, and otherwise mauled, to insensibility, nor to the possible contingency that he might be killed outright. But as the leader of a forlorn hope goes on outpost duty when the enemy are most likely to appear, just because it is his particular responsibility to expose his life, having taken his men into danger, so John, having been prime mover in the campaign against Nyne, and knowing that but for his action at "The Grapes" and before, there would have been no risk at all, took every care that he should be the person to receive the enemy's first fire, and only suffered from nervousness when he thought of the possibility. that Nyne might strike at Evelyn instead.

He was not aware, it need hardly be said, that she had taken to nursing in the Warren. He trusted to Dr. Stansfield's former guarantee to Giles, and to Malony's power of obtaining correct information as to Nyne's movements. As to himself, John was fully determined to walk into any snare placed in his way, with or without informing any one, as circumstances might determine. His main object was that Nyne should commit himself so far that, whether he failed or succeeded, he would never dare to show his own face openly again in the Nile. He intended to save himself if he could, but as with any other fighter, he put that consideration in the second place.

Evelyn was hopeful, because every day that she spent in the Warren decreased her fear of Nyne, and even, to a small

degree, her detestation for him, and increased her confidence in herself.

A criminal community is far less unpleasant when you are working in it than when you see it from the outside, and when you go there as comforter in time of trouble, and to alleviate pain, and find yourself welcomed everywhere, a remarkable change takes place in your attitude toward the people who belong to it. No one knew this better than Dr. Stansfield, and as he did not know that there was any reason for Evelyn to be singled out for attack by any one—for he was the last person John or Giles or the Symeses would think of confiding in—he is not to be judged too hardly for allowing her to enter the Warren.

Evelyn herself knew better. But she took precautions. Not only did she don the nurse's uniform, and by concealing her hair under her bonnet change her appearance almost as much as a man who shaves off beard and moustache, but she purchased a pair of large blue spectacles, on Dr. Stansfield's advice, and invariably wore them when on her rounds there. Thus disguised, and finding that she met in this place none of the people who had ever applied to the Society, and that when on one occasion she came unexpectedly face to face with Nyne himself he gave no sign of recognition, she went about her avocations with a peaceful mind. And what a wonderful revelation the work was! She had often heard it said that in such communities the lack of principle and character among the people is compensated for in some degree by their susceptibility to kindness, and the quickness and intensity of their emotions, but she never realised how much this was the case until she nursed them in sickness. They were ignorant beyond belief; their capacity for lying was extraordinary; their immorality of living—apart from their professional thieving—was almost stupefying at first; but their capacity for self-sacrifice, their generosity and loyalty to one another, even their sense of honour where friendship was concerned, were beyond anything she had ever seen among the "respectable poor." Brutal animals and even wild beasts they might be in many ways; but at

least, on the other hand, they had the quality that civilised man so often does not possess—the desire and the capacity for strong and tender love. It was this, partly, that made Evelyn's former opinion of Nyne waver, for these people, she found, loved him.

At first she thought it was hypocrisy. He was their landlord; he had their money, and was their master in a dozen ways. They feared him; many grovelled to him. Yet Evelyn presently found that it was not these who spoke most highly of the guv'nor. His best friends, she discovered, were among the stronger ones, especially those women who held chief sway in the place. His faults were not denied, and every one said that he was too much in league with the police. But it was the general opinion that he led the police by the nose, and that though his leanings in that direction were bad for the interests of the Warren, and even disastrous in individual cases, it was taken as inevitable, and for every instance quoted of men who had been "copped" at a hint from him, a dozen were given of where he had thrown the enemy on to a false scent; while case after case of generous help which he had given to tenants in trouble, and of families he had supported while the men were "doing time," came to Evelyn's knowledge. She found, indeed, that this unspeakable person had one soft spot. No woman with children in the Warren had ever appealed for help to the guv'nor in vain.

In the matter which was of the greatest moment—Mr. Glynn's safety—Evelyn received information the second day she was in the place, and which she duly communicated to Pat Malony. The Warren had considered and deliberated over his case, she was told, and decided that though he was an obnoxious personality, he was too formidable to attack, and that if he refrained from interfering with the Warren the Warren would not interfere with him. In fact, that no violent, desperate resentment was cherished against him for his treatment of the guv'nor at all. This comforted Evelyn. She knew their "scheme" provided that gentle and friendly efforts should be made, as opportunity offered, to

gain the men and women of the Warren as in other parts of the Nile. She did not believe that Nyne would dare to provoke the enemy who had crushed him, unless he had overwhelming odds in his favour, and it seemed to her that every day that passed made such a possibility more remote. Last of all, the good that she heard of Nyne gave her hope that, after all, he was not so black as he had been painted by Giles. After a few days, therefore, she began to look upon her own work in the Warren as part of the necessary training or preparation for the "scheme."

Some months of nursing among these people, and a short course in the summer in a hospital, which Dr. Stansfield said he could arrange, and she would be competent to begin the second part of her work, and gather together and train other women, especially the district visitors of churches and missions, to learn what she was learning to do—teach the value of cleanliness, order, and domestic economy in the home to mothers and wives, as well as the simpler forms of nursing.

This being her intention, there was really no need for any further concealment from Mr. Glynn and Giles of what she was about. Yet she delayed telling her secret from day to day. She told herself that this was because her one confidant—Malony—still declared obstinately that the danger for a reprisal from Nyne was not past; and Malony did declare it with all the force that was in him. But, in her heart, she knew that the real reason lay deeper. She had faced the Warren and its dangers for Mr. Glynn's sake alone. Until sufficient time had passed for other objects to be so apparent that no questions need be asked on this point, she must keep the matter to herself; no one should know the personal motive except Malony, who had inevitably known it from the beginning, and her mother, to whom she had frankly told the whole business. Mrs. Grey took the matter very calmly, as Evelyn had hoped she would, and said that it was a perfectly natural action to take concerning one who had been so good a friend as Mr. Glynn. She had then changed the subject. A few days afterwards she had an-

nounced her intention of going to the dinner at Lady Wendover's, whatever happened, to meet Mr. Glynn. That was all.

Thus a month went by. Seven weeks had passed since the fight at "The Grapes," and all was still quiet in the Nile.

CHAPTER XXXII

TRAPPED

PERCIVAL NYNE had spent the greater part of his life in the East. He was born just beyond the city, and was articled to a solicitor by his father, a well-to-do tradesman, whose intention it was to buy him a partnership later. When he was three and twenty, however, something happened. It is not our business, forty years afterwards, to go into details; but it is necessary to note that Nyne was a leading spirit even then among a group of young men, whose ways were so nefarious that, when inevitable exposure came, he found it necessary to go abroad in a hurry and stay there. He was not without money, and possessed the faculty of making it wherever he happened to be. He took kindly to Eastern life, and as time went on, by transactions as a trader in Greece, in Cyprus, and finally in Constantinople, he became a rich man. He made his money in various ways. He was a merchant, and some of his goods caused it to become necessary for him to work upon men's lowest passions. He learned to deal with many queer customers, and to steer himself through many awkward circumstances. Nyne remained abroad five and twenty years. At the age of forty-five his health failed, and the doctors ordered him back to England for a long furlough. He never left his native shores again. Chance brought him into the Nile; the life of that community attracted him, and he gradually settled down there, invested a considerable portion of his capital in a variety of concerns connected with the place, one of these being the purchase of a long lease of the Warren. In the end the interest and business of Nyne's life became centred in the Nile. Well might those who knew the guv'nor best shake their heads sceptically at there being the least possibility of

uprooting him, except by the most violent means, from the district of his choice.

Nyne was from the East, and, therefore, was not hasty either in thought or action, differing in this from his adversary. It remained to be seen whether the slow, careful tenacity of the Eastern man, or the swift intrepidity and strength of the man from the West would gain the day. They were fairly matched, and knew it; and John, waiting for the guv'nor to strike, Nyne preparing at his leisure the blow which was to remove this incubus which had fallen upon his life, felt each in his own way a curious personal respect for his enemy.

"Nyne is no coward," John said to Giles once. "You are mistaken in thinking he has ever been afraid of me. I stunned him, for the moment, but the man is game. He will begin biting soon."

"Glynn is not asleep, James," Nyne said to Inspector Halkin. "If I wait a year he'll be ready. He is made of steel, my friend, not pig-iron like you."

But Nyne had not the least intention of waiting a year. Without pause, though without haste, he made his preparations, and by the eighth week after he had discovered the nature of the man with whom he had to deal, he was ready.

The plan he made was devised with a much fuller knowledge of the difficulties of the enterprise than most of his enemies had any idea of. He knew perfectly well who this "nurse" was in the Warren in the large bonnet and conspicuous blue spectacles; he knew the temper of the Warren to a hair; further, he knew that if at any moment John set foot there he would do it with eyes wide open and be prepared for any contingency. He was well aware, also, that Evelyn was kept continually under the eye of the police, and that if a hand were raised against her, swift retribution would follow. It was Halkin who had told him this, warning him that an order had gone forth from the Superintendent himself, and that, whatever happened, the personal security of the secretary of the Society must be guaranteed. In reply Nyne had

guaranteed it, though with a peculiar smile that gave the Inspector forebodings.

It was Monday, the 12th of December, the day of Lady Wendover's dinner party, and one of Evelyn's afternoons at the Warren.

In the morning, according to her invariable custom in these days, she asked John where he was going to pay visits. She did it in the most official manner possible, and John answered as officially; but he knew the reason of her inquiry, and she knew that he knew it.

This day the only visit which Evelyn remarked upon at all was one in a street near the Warren. A letter had come to the office, written in a scrawly, illiterate woman's hand, asking that a gentleman from the Society would visit her boy, who was a cripple and consumptive, and whom she had been ordered by a doctor to get away from London for twelve months, to save his life.

Evelyn scrutinised the letter suspiciously. "If that address were in the Warren," she said, "I should think that it was a trap."

Giles was called into consultation.

"Oh, I know that lad," he said. "He is all his mother says, if his mother wrote this. I think, therefore," he added, with studied coolness, "that Mr. Glynn might let me make the visit, seeing that it is plain sailing."

John laughed.

"Mind your own business, Giles. Nothing concerns you that is within half-a-mile of the Warren. If I had any nerves, I should find an excuse to get there now, just to draw Nyne's fire and have it over. This visit seems quite ordinary business, and I shall make it."

He intended to go early, but was delayed by his accounts refusing to balance, and it was not until half-past three that he reached the house. It was in a street running parallel with the Warren, lower down the Nile. The thought of a trap, if it had ever seriously entered his mind, had vanished by the time he asked the woman who answered the door whether Mrs. Boncaster lived there.

"Second floor back," was the answer. "Knock three times." And having delivered herself of this reply, the lady of the house, whose arms were covered with soap suds, marched back to the wash-tub in the basement below, and shut the door of her room hard.

John, quite accustomed to directions of this kind, would have followed her instructions, but the knocker was half broken, and made so poor an appearance, that without troubling to use it, he mounted the stairs to the second floor.

It was an old, shabby tenement house, with a dark and very rickety staircase. In ordinary circumstances the ascent of a large man weighing fourteen stone would have been heard all over the building, but it is not weight, but the want of balance, which in most cases produces a heavy tread. John, from his natural suppleness, and still more from training, had a lighter step than some men of half his weight, and as he was by this time well accustomed to such places, he mounted quickly. The consequence was, he reached the landing below the room indicated just one minute before he was expected by those within, and was in time to perceive that some one left the room he was seeking, and went up the stairs to the floor above. There was nothing remarkable in this, but the person was a man, and John knew from the letter he had received, and from Giles, that Mrs. Boncaster was a widow, living alone with the crippled son. There was, besides, something in the step of the retiring person which suggested to John haste and purpose. So, his suspicions aroused, he exerted his strength, and sprang so rapidly up the last flight, that he was in time to catch sight of the man before he disappeared above. He was short, and broad, and dark. John knocked at the widow's door, and at the same time opened it an inch or two, being determined to make his entrance into the room before the occupant had time to prepare matters for his reception. In forming accurate opinions of the conditions of a person desiring charitable help, it is particularly essential to see, if possible, the domestic economy of her habitation as it really is, not as it

may appear when time has been given to arrange it for a visitor's eye.

The result was startling. A whispered exclamation came in a woman's voice from within, a foot was thrust against the door, and if it had not been that John's own foot was in such a position that the door could not close, it would have been slammed in his face. An instant later it was opened, and a woman confronted him.

"I have come from the Society," John said. "May I come in?"

Mrs. Boncaster stared, as if in great surprise, holding the door tightly. "Eh, bless my soul! I'm very sorry, sir. Why, I thought you was the tally man. Pray come in and take a chair. Joe, give the gentleman a chair." She stood back for John to enter, and he saw that there was only one other person in the room, a lad of sixteen, a humpback, with short, spindly legs, very much bowed, and a transparent, hectic complexion, stamped deeply with the marks of consumption, who at the woman's words slipped off a chair near a large bed.

John thanked him, took the chair, and, placing it so that his back was to the window and against the wall, and his face to the door, seated himself, with a remark concerning the weather. But he was keenly on the alert now, every nerve alive.

Mrs. Boncaster was a thin, hook-nosed woman of forty, with the remains of good looks in her face, marred by secretive eyes, with heavy lids, and a weak, shifty mouth. She had a better appearance than most of her neighbours, being cleanly in person and neat in her dress. Her room was poor, but decent. It contained one large bedstead and a small truckle chair-bed, a good chest of drawers, a table, and three Windsor chairs. There were the usual china ornaments on the mantelpiece, and several photographs on the walls, neatly framed. There was one feature in the room which John had never seen before in a working woman's home in Relton. In the wall opposite to the door, and beside the window, was a recess, over which, covering it com-

pletely, was draped a heavy curtain, hung from a brass rod. In the bedroom of middle-class people this might have been a wardrobe; but persons of Mrs. Boncaster's stamp, with an obviously scanty supply of garments, and those by no means good, do not, as a rule, have wardrobes from the ceiling, five feet in breadth. Besides, the curtain looked too heavy; yet John, as he sat down to converse with Mrs. Boncaster about her boy, was sure he saw it move. He looked round, thinking of possible contingencies. At his back was the window, at his left the bed, in front—between him and the door—the table, and to the right the recess behind the curtain. Beyond the recess was the fire-place, where a large saucepan simmered gently upon glowing embers. The size of the whole room was about eleven feet square.

Mrs. Boncaster had a ready tongue, and entered into details about her boy's ailments at a great rate, but she was very nervous, and after a minute or two it struck John that she was talking against time, by preconcerted plan. He did not object to this, for he needed a little time himself; so he asked questions, and used his eyes and considered. The window looked out upon a small back yard and a row of houses behind. These, John remembered, were the Warren. A thought struck him now, and making an excuse to look at a photograph of Mrs. Boncaster's late husband, he glanced through the window, and took careful note of the surroundings of the house. It was next but one to the corner of the street, and had been built at the same time as those in the court. The yard below, under the window, was a mere strip of pavement a few feet wide, and the wall of the house was carried on to those in the Warren. To all intents and purposes, therefore, the place was in the Warren, and there was probably some avenue of internal communication between the two places; that would explain, if this were Nyne's trap, of which he had small doubt, why he had been drawn into the house. He began to listen for steps outside the door.

The woman, meanwhile, described with much circumlocution the anxieties she had endured over her crippled boy,

who, while she talked, sat still and indifferent on the bed, and looked, John thought, rather like a young edition of Percival Nyne.

"Never no peace, sir," Mrs. Boncaster explained, with a measured emphasis and coolness, as if she were repeating something learnt by heart. "First his legs went wrong, and then his hip, and then his poor back, and now the chest; and they do say—the doctors—that he must have a wonderful constitution to battle with all them things as he has done, and that he'll be a man yet if he can get away. Now you just look at him for yourself, sir, if you don't believe me. No, no! I would like you to look," as John made a motion of dissent. "You never will credit what his constitution is if you don't see his back. Joe, you lay down on the bed, lovey. Now, sir, if you just feel him, where his ribs are, you'll see there ain't no more flesh on them bones than if they'd been picked."

She had risen, with a movement of her hand, which seemed a little unnecessary if it were meant for her son, upon which the boy drew himself on to the big bed, and, lying down at full length, unbuttoned his waistcoat.

Obedient to her request, John rose also, turned his back squarely on the door, and laid his hand on the boy's body; but as he crossed the room he had dropped his hands into his pockets and drawn something over them which had the clink of steel, while, after one glance at the figure on the bed, he kept his eyes on the wall, where at some former period, before the bed was moved into its present position, a small mirror had been fixed upon a wooden bracket. In this mirror John now saw two men appear from behind the curtain of the recess. At the same instant the door was softly opened from the outside.

John stooped over the bed for one moment, and then sprang swiftly to the right. By this means he eluded the men behind, who, as he stooped, had rushed at him, and now collided with Mrs. Boncaster before they could stop themselves. Had there been time, he would then have dashed at the door and fought his way out; but this had been provided

against. With a quickness equalling his own, a man who had entered as the others charged slammed the door to and stood against it, bent ready for a spring, and John caught the flash of steel in his hands, and saw that he faced a dangerous enemy. He changed his plan, caught up the table in both hands, and dashed it against the foremost of the men at the bed, knocking him backwards. The other man avoided the shock, and with a steel jemmy struck a savage blow, that would have brained John if it had gone home, but with a boxer's address, John slipped half a step back, and caught the man a heavy blow in the stomach. It was a restrained blow, struck for a purpose. Had it been with John's full power, the man would hardly have breathed again; as it was, the poor wretch doubled up as if shot, dropping his jemmy. This John caught up, just in time to meet the man at the door, as he sprang upon him with bared knife. There was no time to avoid the blow altogether, and the assailant, Nappold, was not one to hit wild. He stabbed swiftly and low, and though John swerved at the instant, the knife blade cut a deep flesh wound between the ribs in his right side. The next moment Nappold lay senseless upon the man who had dropped the jemmy, while the third assailant—who, being a big fellow, trusted to his weight, and now tried to close—received a left-hander with the knuckle-duster which shattered his jaw and drove three teeth down his throat.

The room was clear, the boy and the woman having disappeared under the beds; but even as John considered whether he should give his last enemy the *coup-de-grâce* with the jemmy before trying the stairs, he heard the shuffle of approaching feet outside, and knew that his retreat was cut off. These three men had been but an advanced guard. Nyne had made sure this time. The crisis was desperate; there was no possibility of defending himself in this room, and no escape from the window; suddenly he thought of the recess. It might have only been a hiding-place, but it might be something more. Before the men on the stairs had reached the door, he seized the saucepan on the fire and

overturned its contents into the flames. A frightful spluttering arose, and the room was filled with steam and smoke, under cover of which John dashed into the recess, ran his fingers over it, and discovered the handle of a door, and stepped into a passage with a stairway at the end, faintly lighted by a small window in the wall. Down this he ran, reached another door which opened outwards, dashed through this and along the further passage. He was stopped by a door at the end fastened by a Chubb lock. It was not to be opened, and the thought struck him at once that this was Nyne's trap. It was only the work of a moment, with his jemmy, to force the door, for it opened on the inside, then, clubbing his weapon, he dashed in, ready for the worst. But there was no enemy here. The place was a bedroom, in which lay a woman, with a young baby at the breast, and beside her a nurse in uniform wearing large blue spectacles.

CHAPTER XXXIII

ENTANGLEMENTS

THE presence of these women astonished John, who had expected to fall into another trap. But he had no time to think about it. He closed the door, and secured it with three heavy bolts he found on the inside, just before the men behind him threw their weight against it.

The nurse tore off her spectacles.

"This is a trap; are you hurt?"

His face quivered.

"You! Here? Oh, my God!"

The words were wrung from him by a sharp, menacing sound which came from the other side of the room, under a window. He went to it and looked out. They were in the Warren, and the Court was packed with an angry crowd of men and women. At the sight of John, their snarling murmur rose to a howl of execration, and a heavy stone was flung through the glass, narrowly missing his head. The Warren was roused, and all retreat cut off. Nyne had made no mistake, after all.

John drew back to avoid the stone, and found Evelyn at his side. She had seen what he saw, and her face was deadly white.

"The murderous cowards," she cried. "But they cannot get at you here. I have bolted all the doors below, and——"

Her voice was drowned by the attack of the men in the passage upon the inner door, answered by the shrill cries of the baby, startled out of its sleep, and the frightened whimpering of the woman in the bed. John looked slowly round the room. All would be over in a few moments. The crowd in the Warren had not collected by chance. They

were placed there by Nyne, and knew of what had happened to their friends over the way. John thought he had caught a glimpse among them of the man with the broken jaw. He had seen also what Evelyn had not, that men were bringing forward a ladder toward the window. Meanwhile plaster was falling from the ceiling in large pieces at the furious onslaught made upon the inner door. The bolts were bending already. It would not hold much longer. It was no time for conventions or ceremony. John was as desperate as only a man can be when a life more precious than his own is in imminent danger.

He swung Evelyn into a corner of the room, where they could face both door and window, and be shielded from stones and other missiles, then slipping his hand to his back, he drew out from a long pocket there a revolver, which he had carried daily since his visit to Nyne. This was no silver-plated, pellet-firing plaything, but the largest and deadliest of its kind, an American Army "Colt," with a ten-inch rifle barrel, a bore larger than a Winchester rifle, and a bullet which, wherever it sped in such hands as John's, would kill.

Evelyn caught his wrist.

"No, no; not that!"

He looked down at her and smiled. Such a smile! It was the end for him. Pursuers at the door, and a furious crowd outside. He was looking upon the woman he loved for the last time.

"It is not for myself," he said, disengaging her hand, "but for you."

There was a splitting and straining of wood. A jemmy had been thrust between the door and the framework which held the upper bolts. It was a matter of moments now, and it seemed as if the men outside realised this. A strange quiet had fallen upon the Court.

Evelyn's face flushed, but she struggled still.

"How can I escape if you kill them? There will be so many left. Don't do it. Let me speak to them; they know me; I came in here on purpose."

He drew a sharp breath at the thought of what she had risked, and why. But there was no time to speak of it.

"They will not listen," he answered. "They are mad. I must deal with those at the door, every one, and then go outside alone."

"They will tear you in pieces."

"You will be safe; that is all that matters."

Crash! The top bolts of the door gave way, and a short, dark man forced and twisted woodwork back and sprang into the room, and Evelyn as well as John saw the knife between his teeth. Behind him were six others. John straightened himself, took a step forward, and coolly measured the length of the room. With his left arm he held Evelyn behind him, in his right hand was the revolver, the muzzle pointing to the ground. The light of the window showed the men their danger. Though John did not speak, they paused by common consent. Never before, rough as their lives had been, had they seen death so plainly written in their path. Only Nappold, the foremost, laughed, showing his strong white teeth.

"He will miss," he cried, swaying his body from side to side, and edging forward on tiptoe. "Rush at him, all together!"

He glanced behind him, and shook his fist in the air, but the men did not move. They were gazing now in another direction, with a fixed, terrified stare. Nappold snarled a curse at them, and turned to spring across the room, upon which John raised his pistol-hand a few inches and tightened his grip of the trigger. But he did not fire, for Evelyn cried out:

"Look! Look! At the window."

John did so, covering Nappold still, and saw a man pushing up the lower sash.

"Steady, lads," said a quiet voice John knew; "the game's up, you know."

It was Mr. Samuel Smith, the Superintendent. The muzzle of John's pistol dropped again to the ground, though he held it ready. But there was no need. At the sound of that

well-known voice a panic seized even Nappold. With a cry, he dropped his knife, turned, pushed aside those behind him, and ran for his life, the rest following helter-skelter.

Mr. Smith, meanwhile, squirmed his way throug'- the window, and raised his hat to Evelyn.

"Cold day, miss," he said. "A close thing, seemingly."

Then he suddenly turned his back on them.

"You have something in your hand, Mr. Glynn, which I don't like the look of. I have not seen it, and I don't want to."

John tucked his weapon away.

"Thank you, Superintendent, again." His voice was as quiet as the policeman's, but there was a deep ring in it.

Mr. Smith scarcely seemed to hear him. He had dropped on his hands and knees, and was searching for something on the ground.

"Talk to Giles," he answered, laying his hand upon what he sought, and going to the window. "He is below somewhere. He is responsible." He was at the window now, and was examining what he had found. It was Nappold's knife.

"A rare good article, this," he remarked. "And it has been used. Mr. Glynn, you must be wounded."

"A scratch somewhere," John replied. "But let me see that knife. Ah! it is the same I saw in——"

He was about to say where, when the Superintendent raised a warning finger, and he remembered the presence of the woman in the room.

A heavy step now echoed down the passage, and a constable marched through the broken door and stood at attention.

"Well, Brockley?"

"Got 'em, sir."

"How many?"

"All, sir."

"The nigger, too?"

"Just, sir; but he's lamed the Sergeant."

"Bad job for the nigger. Undo the doors to the Court,

Brockley, and let Mr. Giles and the Irishman up; no one else. And take the woman away."

Evelyn superintended this removal, which was finally accomplished by the constable taking both the woman and her baby in his arms, and depositing them with a neighbour.

When Evelyn returned, she found John on the bed, and the Superintendent at work, with Giles and Patrick Malony helping him.

"A clean rip, sir," Mr. Smith was saying. "No harm in it, if you are careful, but you have lost too much claret, by more than half a pint. Now the bandage, Alfred."

Evelyn would have liked to interfere, for she could claim now to be skilled in such work as any professional nurse, but she saw that Mr. Smith knew his business, and discreetly refrained. It was wonderful to see how skilfully those enormous hands did their work, and how quickly. In a few minutes all was finished, and John on his feet.

Then there was a hearty shaking of hands, for old Giles was nearly overcome with his anxiety, and Malony not much better.

"It is all through Mr. Smith, here," Giles declared, after a minute or two, in which he had used the big handkerchief at least half-a-dozen times. "If I had not run across him at the moment I did we would have been dished, clean."

"You lie, Alfred," the Superintendent contradicted from the door, whither he had fled at the mention of his name. "Divide the honours with Malony, and keep me out, or we quarrel, serious. Remember to meet me to-morrow at Westmoreland Place."

"If that is at Nyne's," Malony exclaimed, as the Superintendent departed, and they prepared to follow him out of the Court, "then, sure as I am a sinner, the guv'nor's done."

Giles gave a savage chuckle.

"Nyne! There will be no more left of Nyne after this, Pat, than will fetch the price of an old umbrella. Trust Smith for that job."

The Warren was as quiet as a tomb when they went down it in the dusk. A few policemen remained in the Court until

the party had passed through to the East Road, but their presence was unnecessary. The spirit of the place was broken. It might recover by-and-by, but for the present a child might have wandered there.

"It's all Smith, Mr. Glynn," Giles reiterated, as they turned in the direction of Critchett Place, "and Malony, here. Don't you interrupt, Pat," he cried threateningly. "I will not have any Irish blarney from you."

Then he gave a deep chuckle.

"Sam is rare, to be sure. The way of it all was this: I had my doubts of that woman Boncaster, and to make certain of the ground, I follows you, sir; and when I gets to Nile Street, just looks about for one of the constables they puts on point there; but I finds none, not one; and if there is not a barney over that at the station this evening, when Mr. Smith gets in, my name ain't Giles. But never mind that. Seeing no one to speak to, I goes on my own, and knocks at the house you went into. I could not get in, noways, so I smelt rats, you may be sure, and round I goes to the other end of the Warren in the East Road. Half-way there I meets a plain-clothes man I know, coming out of a pub. He had no business in that pub, but no matter for that; he was a godsend. In half a crack I had sent him on the run for the nearest 'point,' while I goes on to the Warren. There I meets Malony. He will tell you, p'r'aps—he won't tell me—how he had heard a racket was coming. But he had got it, somehow, from some one inside, and he, like me, was hunting for the police. Just then, round the corner, who should come by but Mr. Smith. I could have hugged him, sure. We told him what we knew, and without a word he just quietly walks straight into the mouth of that little black human-hell and us after him. It was a daring thing, even for Smith. But it was the only thing to save you. And they knew him, right enough, and run like rabbits. So we gets to you, while my man breaks in the other side, and cops the lads that was after you, neat as ninepence. Now, Malony, let's hear your story."

Malony laughed, with a mysterious air.

"Why, then, I would not contradict a man so much bigger than meself as you, not for the whole wide world, Mr. Giles; only, there's one besides Mr. Smith we owe the life of our best friend to—one who got me the news, and went into the jaws av it all, and locked the doors and kept them howling tigers down in the Court. Other ways, ye speak the truth, as ye always do, just."

They had reached Critchett Place by this time, and Evelyn, breaking hastily in upon these narratives, told Giles that it was time he was going home.

The hint was not lost on Malony, either, and the two went off together, arm-in-arm, for a quiet glass, and left Evelyn and John alone in the office.

"Your wound must be very painful," she said, in a rapid, constrained tone, picking up some unopened letters and breaking the seals. "Of course you will not be at the dinner to-night."

"I shall, most certainly," he replied. "This is only a scratch. Besides, people must not talk."

Evelyn looked up, with a quick smile.

"They will talk. How can it be helped?"

"By not letting them hear."

She looked down at her letters again. There was a curious hardness and urgency in his tone she could not understand.

"It is impossible," she said, "that it should be kept secret."

"That is true, inside the Nile; but outside, except that you have faced the Warren—I want that known—except for that, nothing need be said. That is why I do not want my little accident to leak out."

"I do not understand," she said slowly. "We are at cross purposes. I will not have anything said about myself. You must promise to say nothing. No one but my mother knows I have ever been inside the Warren. But why should your part be kept secret?"

John's teeth closed. He felt ill, and the loss of blood made him weak and stupid. Yet something told him that a purpose which had vaguely been forming in his mind for

weeks past, and which had now become inevitable, should be told to her now, before they parted.

"I have made up my mind to leave the Nile," he said incoherently. "I shall give up my work in Relton at once, and leave London altogether, and"—he had to shut his teeth again, and brace every muscle to keep his voice steady—"and I do not want your friends to know yet that you were forced into this danger. When I am gone, every one must know, and that but for your courage all would have failed. But not while I am here——"

He paused, and waited for her to speak. He was acutely conscious that his words must appear confused, and almost senseless, though their meaning was perfectly clear to himself.

But Evelyn did not seem to hear them.

"It is very sudden," was all she said.

He breathed more freely. If she had asked him what he meant, he might have told her everything. He was very weak just then.

"It seems sudden, but it is not, really. I have felt for some time that I ought to go, but I could not until Nyne was settled with. The Superintendent will now take him in hand. There is no need for me now in the Nile any longer, so I must go. But how late it is, after half-past five. Goodbye, till we meet again."

He took up his hat, steadied himself, walked to the door, and closed it behind him. He did not look back, and Evelyn said nothing. He stood on the steps, and clung to the railings. He felt giddy and sick. Then the gate below him swung open, and Giles came up.

"Good!" John said faintly, "the very man I want. Take me to the 'Scrope Arms,' Giles, I can walk there, with your arm, and get me a glass of brandy. Then find me a hansom; I must drive home."

Giles led him slowly and carefully down the steps.

"You are knocked up, Mr. Glynn, and fair bowled over. Something has happened just now. Pardon me, I think you knows what I mean."

John pressed the arm he held, and by the help of which he could walk fairly easily.

"Yes," he said, "something has happened, Giles; I have done what I ought to have done a month ago."

Giles started.

"You ain't going to tell me that——"

"Yes, I am," John said, in his usual curt tone. "I leave London for good within a month, and I have told Miss Grey."

CHAPTER XXXIV

AN EXPLANATION

EVELYN found her mother in evening dress when she got home—a stately little figure in her rustling black silk and lace cap.

"How late you are, dear," she said; "the carriage will be here in ten minutes"—then catching sight of Evelyn's face. "Child, what have you been doing? You are as white as a ghost."

Evelyn tried to smile.

"There has been another adventure, and rather a trying one. I will tell you about it when we are in the carriage."

On such occasions as these Mrs. Grey was her daughter's lady's maid, placing everything ready beforehand, and even choosing what she should wear. Evelyn nearly always arrived at the last minute, and was thankful to be saved all trouble. To-night, however, she was in a curious mood. Nothing that her mother had put out satisfied her. White and wan though she looked, and tired as she certainly was, yet never was she so particular over every detail or so intent upon looking her best.

"I must have my blue dress, mother," she said; "this one is really getting a little dowdy. The blue is rather nice, I think. Miss Malkin never made one which fitted better. It suits me, too."

Mrs. Grey shook her head doubtfully.

"I'm not sure, my dear. Much depends upon your looks. If you are tired or at all bored you look too pale. The black would be much better to-night, for you are very white now, let me tell you."

Evelyn gave a queer little laugh, which was half a sigh.

"I shall not be by the time I get to Aunt Caroline's. I shall look pretty well, you will see."

And Mrs. Grey did see. Whether it was the excitement of the story Evelyn had to tell in the carriage, whether, as Evelyn said herself, it was the pleasure of meeting her chief, Mr. Brooke, cannot be said. Mrs. Grey, privately, did not think it was either of these things. But, whatever the cause, when the old butler threw open the drawing-room door and announced them, Evelyn had never looked handsomer. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes full of animation and spirit, and if her lips were not quite as steady as usual—at one moment composed, at another tremulous—no one but the keen eyes of her mother perceived it.

It was a small, informal party. Only Mr. and Mrs. Brooke, and General and Mrs. Gainsborough had been invited besides Dick and John.

The young men had not arrived.

"We were discussing you, Miss Grey," the General said, after greetings. "Your works and your workers. I have been doing my best to inspire Mr. Brooke in private—I dare not do it officially—with the profound dread which I feel concerning these startling new enterprises in the Nile. But I make no impression upon him at all."

Evelyn smiled.

"That is possible, General. Mr. Brooke knows you are a powerful supporter of the enterprises."

"Ah, that is just the point," he persisted, "paradoxical though it may seem. As I have just told Mr. Brooke, the danger of the situation lies in this, that Mr. Glynn, yourself, and Mr. Brabant—I don't know who is the worst—scheme and plan and persuade with such hypnotic enthusiasm that even such steady old stagers as Major Hamer and myself are swept off our feet, and become your aiders and abettors before we can turn round. And, upon my word, I believe the chief secretary here is the worst of us all."

Mr. Brooke laughed genially.

"I believe in Mr. Glynn," he said, seizing upon the kernel of the matter, as his way was; "he knows his own mind,

and never hesitates. Yet he looks all round before he leaps, and does not go too fast for other people."

"I never met a man who knew better how to get his own way," the General declared. "Whether it be the Committee or the people of the district, or even the heads of the police, they are merely as silk to the weaver when they fall into Glynn's hands. I trust that it won't end in a tangle."

"I think not," Mr. Brooke said gravely, seeing that the General was partly in earnest, "because there will be no loose ends in his skein. He is not afraid of responsibility, but he sets others thinking and working on their own account, and does not interfere unless it is necessary. That is good weaving. His work, when finished, will stand wear and tear. Until it can do so he will keep hold of the ends."

The General looked relieved.

"I am satisfied. You are a judge of men."

"It is Miss Grey who must be the judge here."

Mr. Brooke turned to Evelyn with a questioning glance which Evelyn felt must be answered.

"I think," she said, "Mr. Glynn would never leave unfinished any work that he once began."

She spoke slowly and distinctly, and her mother, who was discussing the dearth of domestic servants with Mrs. Gainsborough, heard the words, and remembered them.

At this moment the butler announced Mr. Glynn and Mr. Brabant, and Mrs. Grey flushed like a girl.

All these two months past the thought had been slowly forming itself in her mind that John Glynn was not as other men to Evelyn. There had been nothing sure or really substantial to build upon, and no one knew better than Evelyn's mother how much must happen before any man would bend her daughter's strong nature, so she had not allowed herself to think too much about it. But the story that she had heard this evening, though very simply, quietly told, had made a deep impression upon her, together with the insistence upon the new dress, and the present brightness and tension in the wearer's face. If he were the man, there would be no other

through Evelyn's life. Could he be worthy? That question she would decide now.

The butler stood aside, John came in, and Mrs. Grey's heart gave a throb of thankfulness. Her eyes searched his face. Strength was in every feature. That was her first impression, almost too much strength. It was a face of iron. Then she saw him smile, and read sweetness of temper and gentleness in the mouth, truth and uprightness in the steady eyes, and throughout the whole, from his square chin to the deeply-lined forehead the greatest quality of all—nobleness. A few minutes later they were sitting side by side at dinner, and Mrs. Grey felt as if she had known him many years.

Evelyn was taken in to dinner by Dick, who found himself in clover this evening. Mrs. Brooke, on his right hand—a lady with a face of great gentleness and sweetness—was kept fully entertained by Sir James Wendover; while General Gainsborough, on Evelyn's left, fell into a vigorous discussion with Lady Wendover upon the proper treatment of the juvenile criminals, a subject upon which they totally disagreed; Dick, in consequence, had the secretary of Relton all to himself, and there was so much to talk about that the eight-course dinner seemed all too short.

The event of the afternoon was, of course, the first point of interest.

"I can't get very much about it out of John," Dick said, in answer to a question—he had fallen into the way of calling his friend by his Christian name to Evelyn now—"but I did not expect that. He will never tell of his own doings. One thing seems quite certain. We shall not hear of Nyne again. He has fallen into the clutches of the police at last. The way for the Institute is clear and safe—and for your work."

Evelyn looked up.

"Mr. Glynn has told you about that," she said quickly, then paused.

"Oh, not a word," Dick answered with a laugh. "I see you do not know the granite one even yet. It was Dr. Stansfield. Giles introduced me to the little man a day or

two ago, and he talked of you in large round capitals for nearly half an hour. I admit that when I got John to myself the same evening I tried to draw him. Don't be angry, please; I did not know you wished it kept a secret. I might as well have squeezed his native stone. I bruised my fingers too, badly."

He made a comical face, and Evelyn smiled.

"I am sorry for your pain. But though my secret is not very deep or dreadful, I wanted to go quietly my own way, first of all."

Dick gave a sympathetic nod.

"I can quite understand. And now that the Nile is clear and safe, you will be able to do so as much as you please. By-the-bye," his face now became very grave, "you know that we are going to lose John." He raised his eyes as he spoke, and Evelyn felt that there was close scrutiny in them.

"Mr. Glynn said something about it to-day," she forced herself to say in a steady tone, a thought too steady. "I am very sorry."

Dick was a close observer, but not a deep one.

"It will be a desperate loss," he said, with emphasis, "and hardly bears thinking about. But it is irrevocable. When he has made up his mind nothing will move him."

"No."

She knew he thought her indifferent and ungrateful, and she almost hated him for it. Yet a sure instinct warned her that her only safety lay in doing nothing to remove the impression. All colour left her cheeks, and her face was like marble. Dick did not speak again for some time. He was hurt, and at the same time relieved. There had been times during the past weeks when he felt a vague discomfort and uneasiness which needed but a spark to become acute jealousy. While John's work and influence had brought Evelyn more closely into touch with Dick than he had ever dared to dream she might be again, and every part of the "scheme" for the Nile, as John had laid it down, inevitably drew the lines of their lives nearer and nearer together, yet beneath it all lay the consciousness in Dick's mind that for

every hour he spent with her John was spending a dozen, and that however earnestly his friend might strive to efface himself—and no one knew better than Dick how much John would strive to do this—yet his personality must stand out beyond all others. Lastly, though Dick, from his impulsiveness and over-readiness to express opinions, gave many people the impression of being egotistical, he was, in reality, very humble-minded, and moreover was an Idealist by temperament. It was impossible for him to believe that any man could know Evelyn without paying her homage, and equally difficult for him to think that any woman could know John without falling under the spell of his strength and sincerity. Thus he had felt uneasiness and doubt even while he was meeting Evelyn more and more frequently as the weeks passed, and though he believed her friendship for him was growing steadily greater.

John's resolution to depart, however, given while they were dressing for the dinner with a cool brevity and decision that admitted of no doubt, while, at the same time, it aroused no suspicion, changed the whole of Dick's attitude. Firstly, he blamed himself savagely for his doubts, and then an impetuous reaction of idealisation of his friend set in. He could have found it in his heart to say something very unpleasant indeed to Evelyn for her apparent want of feeling. The thought indeed did occur to him for a moment that it must be assumed; but when, after the one or two words which dropped like icicles from her lips, she went on with her dinner with as unconcerned a face as if he had said John was going away for a week-end, the thought passed from his mind. A few minutes' reflection supplied him with an explanation of another sort. John had been too masterful. That was why she had secretly taken up new work, and that was why his departure was not a matter for grief to her. They were, in fact, too much alike—both too strong and dominating in character to pull together long. What a royal conflict of wills there would have been had John been her lover; and if she had loved him in return, what strain and stress before she yielded. It would be a grand study.

for a novel. Some day he would attempt it. With which resolve Dick recovered his cheerfulness, and resumed the conversation.

"John did not tell you why he was leaving us, I suppose," he said.

"I did not ask."

He looked up again. Could they have gone so far as to quarrel?

"Oh, there is no secret about that. He has been offered an estate in Yorkshire near where he was born, which is to be sold remarkably cheap, and though he has said nothing about it, I know he has been making inquiries. The present owner, the son of an old friend of his father's, has now invited him down for Christmas, and suggests that he shall spend a month or two with him and sample the hunting and renew his acquaintance of the county people whom he knew when a lad. I say that it will be quite romantic," Dick went on, warming to his subject, and, as usual, enlarging upon it. "Here is John who ten years ago left the land of his forefathers—I believe this very estate belonged to a Glynn once upon a time—almost penniless, returning a rich man, still young, single, and unattached. The county will be at his feet. He is a marvellous rider, and the best judge of horses I know, and he will be the best shot in the covers. He will lead the hunt and——" Dick broke off with a laugh. "Well, I must not speculate further, I suppose. There was once, I was told, a little girl whom John taught to ride to hounds. I wonder whether she hunts still."

There was a rustle of dresses and movement of chairs, and the ladies rose.

"Brabant," said Sir James as he took up the decanters, "what have you been saying to my niece? She was as white as this napkin when she passed me just now, and looked as severe as my wife when some one dares to say that the Society is going downhill, or that Brooke has made a mistake."

CHAPTER XXXV

THE NILE MAKES UP ITS MIND

THE news of John's departure fell like a thunderbolt upon his friends in the Nile. Giles was the bearer of the tidings two days after the affair in the Warren. He looked in at the Symeses' for this purpose on his way home, and found a cheerful party there. Joe and Amy had come to supper, and Pat Malony, having called on business with Tom, had been induced to stay also. Giles's appearance was hailed with enthusiasm, and, of course, nothing would do but that he must join them.

Supper was laid in the parlour behind the red curtain, and Giles, glancing round at the friendly faces from his place of honour beside his hostess, thought of that memorable evening three months ago when he had seen Tom holding by the throat the man to whom he was now handing an immense plate of cold beef. Then he pondered upon all that had happened since, and for a little while kept quiet and said nothing of what he had come to tell.

Even Mrs. Symes was cheerful to-night.

"Come, come, you Tom, I'll not be called over any more," she cried at some jovial remark of her husband's. "Though seeing it is so seldom you ever do turn out right in your ideas, I should not grudge you a crowing for once. Be content with the present, and never mind bygones. If the guv'nor really do give up the Warren and do leave the Nile, and our Mr. Glynn becomes landlord of the property instead, then I will give right in, and owns to being wrong from the start. But, mind, it ain't come about yet. Will that do you, old smarty?"

"That it will, Kate," the big man cried, lifting an immense pitcher of ale, and, after filling his glass, handing it to Joe.

"Now then, every one of ye, fill up, but don't ye drink one drop till I gives the word. What, Amy, no ale? You must, you must to-night, if it's but a thimbleful. That's the ticket, Joe, make her. Now then, are you all charged?"

He stood up and held his glass high, the rest following his example with smiling faces, guessing what was to come.

"Then, good friends all," he said, and his hoarse voice trembled, "here's health and the heartiest, here's life and the longest, here's happiness and the best to John Glynn and Miss Grey. God bless 'em."

It was well that the night happened to be particularly cold and Crisp Street very empty: well also that Tom's table was substantially made, for not only was the toast honoured with three times three, but Joe and Malony and Tom himself hammered the table with fist and tumbler as they cheered till every dish on it danced.

As soon as these transports had a little subsided, Giles told his news. At first no one would believe that he was serious. When they were obliged to do so, they all began to draw conclusions, which, though each was expressed differently, all came pretty much to the same thing in the end, namely, that it was nothing but a plan—Mrs. Symes called it a fake—by the gentleman in question to make his absence sufficiently felt by some one whose name, by common consent, was not mentioned, and that at the right moment he would return and conquer.

While this speculation, which lasted the whole of supper, went merrily on, Giles sat saying little, but listening to everything until Mrs. Symes, who had at once assumed her former rôle of pessimist, roundly challenged him for an opinion.

"There now, that will do, Tommy, my lad, and the rest of ye," she exclaimed. "You can talk to rights and give as many reasons in a minute as would settle a kingdom. But there's not one of 'em worth a breath. There is only one in this room knows anything, and you'll notice he holds his tongue. Come, Alfred Giles, tell us, as friends all confidential together, what it do really mean? and after you've



cleared that up, what will have to be done? for something will be done, that's a certainty, before we lose Mr. Glynn."

These words were greeted with emphatic approval, then all looked at Giles.

The old man smiled his slow, wise smile with the air of a judge appealed to by the jury.

"It just means, to my thinking, that Mr. Glynn believes he has done a bit of work and needs a rest. You will all agree he has worked, and there is not one of us here who don't know what he has done. I need say nothing to that. But even what we see: Nyne laid by the heels, the Warren—the foulest bit of property on God's earth—likely to change into decent dwellings, an Institute, Library, and what not going to come into bein' just where it's most wanted. All this, I say, that we see is the very least, in a manner of speaking, that this man has done. What do it come to, after all, compared to the power in him which has given men in the Nile, aye, and women too, souls and new lives?"

He paused a moment and the room was very still. "I'll speak for myself," he went on in a lower tone. "I be well on to seventy years old, and fifty of these I have spent in Relton, and if any one had told me the day I first saw Mr. Glynn that the people around the Nile, take 'em all over, was worth a straw in honesty or character, I'd have laughed in his face and said I knew them better. But he's taught me different, so different that the few years I have left in me to work will go now to help on all that he's begun and laid foundation for. Am I the only one to say that in this room?"

He raised his voice a little and laid a hand on Tom's broad shoulder, for the men had risen from the table and were lighting their pipes, while the women gathered up the dishes.

"I be old, I told ye, and so I can speak, I hopes, without offence. What was you, Tom, when you and I and him met over yonder at the 'George'? I ask you straight."

The big man's shoulder shook.

"What was I?" he muttered hoarsely, "a bully, Giles, and worse. I was a damned blackguard."

Giles gave a chuckle.

"Ah, but what are ye now? Don't speak. Joe, you give the answer to that."

And Joe did, though under difficulties, for Amy was crying with her face buried in his coat.

"He's the kindest friend I have, bar one," he said.

"Bedad, and it's no more than true," exclaimed Malony before Giles could speak again. "But the eighty-one-tonner was never a thief; yet, by Mr. Glynn, thieves has been made into honest men. I'll speak for one, and you know, belike, Joe Cramp, that I'm not bearing witness alone."

"I knows," muttered Joe in a whisper.

"And what about us women?" Amy cried, raising her head suddenly. "Don't leave us out. It's all due to him and to Miss Grey I have my husband. If she'd not come that day and him that night—Mrs. Symes can tell the rest."

But Mrs. Symes had disappeared into the shop, and her feelings were only to be conjectured by an extraordinary clashing of milk-cans which took place at this moment on the counter.

"Now, that's rare!" Giles cried in the most cheerful and genial of tones, breaking the tension he had made. "We are all agreed, I sees. Then don't you think he deserves to have his play? What is he going away for? you asks. Why, a tramp over them Yorkshire moors with a gun on his arm, and to get across a thoroughbred for a run after hounds. It'll do him a world of good. As for there being something behind it all, as you say, that is not for me to trouble my head about, nor for none of you, friends, if it comes to that. But there is one thing I do know, and that I will tell you if you don't know it already, and it's worth remembering, too, specially by the ladies, if I may make so bold."

He paused with a significant nod and looked round upon Mrs. Symes, who had returned from the shop.

She laughed.

"Ah, you have got to the point at last. Let us hear it now, it should be good after all this keeping."

"I think it is," Giles said, modestly. "At least it is the last word I has to say, for I must be getting along, thank you kindly. Mr. Glynn may have a reason for going to Yorkshire which he ain't told me. But I am pretty sure, having known him more intimate, in a manner of speaking, than any one else here, that whether he goes altogether, or whether he comes back, he knows his own mind and his own business, and don't want any one else to settle his affairs; and that he having done what he's done, had best be left alone. That's my opinion. I wish you all a good evening."

And away he marched into the frosty night.

"Well, I never did!" cried Mrs. Symes, after a moment of awkward silence; "to think of Giles serving us with that to end up."

"There's truth in it," cried Amy with a little laugh. "I do feel set down proper."

But Mrs. Symes thrust her arms akimbo and jerked back her head in her most aggressive manner.

"Then I do not," she answered, "and if he'd stayed, that old man would have known it. But he knew too much to give me time. What! Giles to talk so—Giles!" Her voice rose to a crescendo. "Why, there ain't, to my knowledge, one among us all who will interfere more quick in all Mr. Glynn's affairs, or who is doing it more certainly now. You mark, all of you, what I say. I wish he was here to put it in his pipe. When all's said and all's done, and the bells of St. Margaret's church are ringing their heads off, and half the police in this division are trying to keep the way clear in Crisp Street for the carriages, and the Nile has gone stark mad and cheered itself into blue fits, it will be Giles—Giles himself—who will own to me and the rest that there was not a moment, day or night, while he was awake, that he did not plan, and plot, and work to bring it all about. And yet he talks so! Let me sit down somewheres, I feels faint."

As for Giles himself, he chuckled at the impression his words would create as he went through the shop, and continued to chuckle all the way down Crisp Street until he

reached the City Road. Then he paused to look about him, and if any one had seen his face a few minutes later as he stood at the corner where Old Street and the City Road meet, chatting to the constable on point, he would not have thought he had laughed all day.

He was waiting for the Superintendent, who sometimes passed at that hour on his way to one of the stations; and presently the constable drew away from him and became the very pink of vigilant attention to duty, and Giles saw the tall, clumsy figure of the great man as he strolled with a listless air, and eyes which were never fixed on anything and saw everything, down Old Street from the west.

"A good meeting, Sam," Giles said, as they walked off together—but not to the station. "I hardly expected you so early."

"I wanted you," Smith answered.

"How did you know I would be here?" Giles cried. "The office closed two hours since."

Smith grunted.

"Your man is hooking it. I thought you would come."

Giles gave a deep sigh.

"Aye, Samuel, I am sore took aback, and that is the truth. I sees no way out at all. If the young 'un had not saved Mr. Glynn's life, or if Mr. Glynn would think something were due to himself just for a change, instead of giving all to other people, it would be different. But as it is, it's hopeless, just hopeless."

He sighed again, and Smith, who was watching him, though he appeared to be gazing into vacancy, saw that his feet dragged, and he looked worn out and very old.

"The young 'un ain't a bad sort," he said in an absent tone. "I have seen worse."

Giles gave a jerk of his shoulders.

"Is he a patch on ours, I ask you?"

"What does she think?"

"What did she go to the Warren for?"

Smith gave an almost imperceptible nod, and they walked on.



"Nyne sells," he said suddenly; "the lawyers have the business in hand now."

"He gets a bouncing big price, I suppose?"

"I fixed the price," the Superintendent said in a mild tone—"£2000."

"No more than that!" Giles exclaimed. "It is worth five at the least. That was a rare stroke of business."

"It was easy when I had shown him Nappold's knife. It was all easy after that," and the Superintendent chuckled gently.

Giles gave a grim laugh.

"You've beat him. And never a man deserved it better. We'll see no more of him. When does he leave the Nile?"

"Next week."

"Halkin is in mourning, I suppose."

"He looks a bit nervous, but he's happier than he was."

"He ought, seeing you did not let him down for taking the men off the Warren that day. The way you treat that man, Samuel, who'd cut your throat for a penny if he had not to face a risk, is the one weak thing I knows about you; but you are very weak there, very!"

Mr. Smith gave a deprecating cough.

"I never argue with you, Alfred. But let me say, you had better keep on the right side of Halkin this winter. He is likely to have my job in a week."

Giles gritted his teeth.

"You were not to be pensioned till spring, I thought."

"It's not 'pension,'" was the reply. "It's gout." He gave a slight stumble even as he spoke, and limped for some twenty paces with a twisted face—just as it happened that a constable went by them on beat, and they passed another on point, and a sergeant.

Giles whispered imprecations to himself, earnest and deep, though he was a man who seldom swore. It would now be all over the division in a few hours that the Superintendent was going to be laid up.

"Where do you feel it, man?" he said anxiously. "The leg?"

"All over," was the doleful answer. "I'll be in bed for a onth," and he limped again. Yet it was a curious coinci-ence, which would have struck Giles if he had not been so uch preoccupied, that when they turned down a side street id found their way into a certain public-house which con-ined a private parlour always at the disposal of the uperintendent, the twinges seemed to cease automatically, id he was not troubled again.

But Giles was too anxious about other matters to notice is. Over a quiet glass he discussed the situation in the ile.

"Things will go on, you understand," he said, "and go ell; I'll be fair. The young 'un is a rare one to organise id make friends with folk; and he is a man and a worker, id not one of them young gentlemen we see sometimes hose opinion of themselves is so wonderful good that they ars to do any work lest they might hurt somebody. Then very one will hold to Miss Grey, for his sake as well as her wn, and you know what she is by now, Samuel."

Smith sighed mournfully.

"So much the worse for the young 'un, Alfred."

"You means best, I thinks," Giles said drily. "It has all en laid out for him, I can plainly see, from the beginning. Ir. Glynn knew what his friend could do, and has set him do it with Miss Grey. And now they'll be at it hand in nd, in a manner of speaking. There was only one slip r Mr. Glynn through the whole piece: her turning to him, id I had hoped—but I were wrong, Sam. It took him long see she even liked him, but that afternoon at the Warren ttled it. Then, in one minute, as you may say, he pulls up, rns around, and goes. He ain't been to the office since, cept once to meet the Committee. He will never come gain."

Giles's voice broke, and without concealment he took out e bandana handkerchief and wiped his eyes.

"It fair breaks my heart, Samuel. They was made for ie another if any two was. There's no other hand but his uld curb her spirit and strength, but he would, just as she,

in a woman's way, would hold him. If he did not know in his heart, as I believe he do," the old man continued sadly, "that she really leans to him, it would come right, for she don't care that," snapping his fingers, "for the young 'un now. But Mr. Glynn knowing, or suspicioning something, knocks it. He will never show his face in the Nile after this. He told me so only last night."

There was a long silence, and then Mr. Smith yawned palpably, obviously—yawned in Giles's face.

"Alfred," he said in a very sleepy tone, "if that is all you have to say, I'm off home."

There was something in his tone and in the blink of his drowsy eyes which brought Giles up to an attitude of keen attention.

"I have tired you, Samuel."

"You have, Alf."

"In what particular way now, and just when did I do it?"

He spoke softly and coaxingly with a wary, watchful eye.

Mr. Smith rose and shook himself as if to rid himself of the old man's scrutiny, and marched away into the private bar, where he paid the score, and so into the street. But Giles followed at his side, watching and waiting, and Mr. Smith could resist no longer.

"I am as tired of your talk, Alfred," he said, gazing at the stars, "as a bloke watching *Hamlet* being played, as they say, with Hamlet left out."

"And who is Hamlet, then, in this, Samuel?"

Mr. Smith gave a contemptuous snort.

"There could be only one in the Nile—the guv'nor."

CHAPTER XXXVI

NO TURNING BACK

It was committee day, and Evelyn, having a heavy day's work before her, together with the accounts, which ought to have balanced on Monday, but would not, and moreover, having received a summons to Villiers Place, to see Mr. Brooke, reached the office at half-past nine.

She ran rapidly through her letters, got out the cases which had to come up for decision that afternoon, and made notes in her diary of all the work that must be done before four o'clock. The amount of it looked appalling; and she pressed her hand against her forehead more than once to ease a dull pain there. It was unaccountable, but a fact, that during the last week she had contracted a headache which began with her work and scarcely left her until bed-time. This morning she felt more stupid than usual, and only by a great effort of self-control forced herself to give her mind to the hundred and one important details needing attention. But she did it, and when Giles came in at ten all was in order, and she was drawing on her gloves, ready to start for the central office.

"Mr. Glynn is coming to committee to-day, Giles," she said, after they had arranged for the morning. "It is his farewell visit. I expect we shall have a good attendance."

Giles gave a cheerful chuckle.

"There is no doubt of it, miss. And if people in Relton knew he was coming, you'd have half the Nile at the gate."

Evelyn smiled.

"I should like that," she exclaimed, a brightness in her face Giles had not seen for many days. "Not one of the Committee, except Mr. Merwell, really knows what Mr. Glynn is to the Nile."



"That is true," Giles answered, with a grim nod; "but mark my words, miss, they will, one of these fine days."

Evelyn made no answer, and was presently on her way to Villiers Place, while Giles sat down to his work. But he did not work for some time.

"I wonder, how I do wonder," he said aloud, being alone, with both doors closed, "what is in her mind exact. I would give mostly all I have to put her under cross-examination, poor young lady, so that I could find out."

But Giles, for once, was wrong. All the cross-examination in the world would have failed to elicit the inner secrets of Evelyn's heart. They were securely locked, and she had not the key herself.

The events of the past three months had followed one another in bewildering succession. It would need weeks, perhaps months, of quiet thought before she could see them in proper perspective, and know what it all really meant to her.

At present she felt tired, shaken, and very much perplexed. In her waking hours and in her dreams, again and again John's passionate cry, when he drew himself from her grasp in order to kill those men and then give himself up for her sake, thrilled her as a woman is thrilled only once in her life.

At that moment she thought she had found her soul, and his. Then came his words afterwards, that he was going away; and still more astounding, Dick Brabant's account of affairs, showing that it had been planned beforehand. What wonder that her brain was in a whirl, and her mind a chaos of conflicting impressions and ideas? Deeper still, also, lay a curious uncertainty with regard to herself. Women of strong will and character, however warm-blooded and passionate—and Evelyn had her full share of the intensity which can give all in a moment, without hesitation or doubt—seldom lose command of themselves for long. Afterwards a reaction sets in. Even when a woman knows, by every sign a man can give, that she is wholly beloved, it is a terrible wrench for her to feel that she has given all that

she is, and all that she has, away; and when the man draws back afterwards——

There were moments in the night which followed the dinner at Lady Wendover's when Evelyn, trying to piece together the events of the day, had felt she could never bear to see John Glynn again, that in the chief quality of a man she had found him wanting, and that the whole of their connection from the beginning was a ghastly nightmare, from which she must escape at once if she were to save her reason. But such thoughts faded as her overstrained brain grew calmer. When she reviewed quietly in detail all that had passed between them, and all he had said and done since the first meeting, she acquitted him of any intention to draw from her what he could not give in return. As the days passed—long, tiring, lonely days—she grew to feel that at the worst she must still respect and believe in the goodness of the man. He was disappointing, perhaps; beyond her comprehension certainly; but he was not bad. Having once spoken of his going, he never wavered or looked back, and had kept away from the office, and refused an invitation from her mother, who, for once, as it seemed to Evelyn, had failed to grasp the situation by asking him to spend an evening at the Mount. He was still the man she had always felt him to be, who, having made up his mind, swerved neither to right nor left; still Dick Brabant's "Granite Glynn."

And this fact, though it made life very hard, and filled her own soul with sickening self-contempt because she wanted him so, really did her good, enabling her to regain balance of mind and self-poise. So that this morning, when a short letter arrived from him—the second, as it happened, that he had ever written to her—saying that he was coming to say farewell to the Committee, it had given her no shock, and brought no tell-tale blush of consciousness to her face, but had been accepted simply and naturally as an event that must take place, an ordeal, perhaps, but which could be endured without murmur or strain. The letter itself she decided to keep, with some other things, in a secret drawer of

her writing desk. It was a short letter of business, written in his strong, clear hand.

Mr. Brooke kept Evelyn waiting nearly half an hour. When at last she reached the private room, she wished she had not come, he looked so worn and harassed. On his table were baskets full of letters awaiting answers, newspaper cuttings, and pamphlets.

"Sorry you should be kept here," he said, in a kindly, genial tone. "The unemployed are upon us, and I had a letter to correct for the *Times* that would not wait. A Mansion House Fund for men out of work in the Metropolis is to be opened after Christmas, and before the end of January every casual ward in the home counties will be full of vagrants tramping to London."

"How awful!" Evelyn exclaimed. "But surely they will only help genuine Londoners, and make a residential test."

"On paper they may," Mr. Brooke said, with his quiet laugh. "In practice, no. At least, I fear not. It is the old story: Trade has been depressed, and the casual labourers in the building trade and at the docks are feeling the pressure. Sensation mongers—clerical and other—step in and make the worst of a state of things which is undoubtedly bad; result, panic and a Mansion House Fund. We are doing our best to induce every one to strengthen the hands of the relief associations, which, at least, know something of the harm done by indiscriminate almsgiving; but the public is getting out of hand, and men in high places, who ought to know better, are beating the big drum. I get no satisfactory assurances anywhere, and fear that in the end it will be a game of grab. But we shall see. Now, let us talk of Relton and your work."

He had been standing with his back to the fire as he talked, with his face thrown back, and his eyes gazing out of the window over Evelyn's head. Now he cast himself into his chair, concentrating his attention upon the matter in hand as if it were his only interest in life. He took up some papers and turned them over one by one.

"Mr. Glynn," he said, his eyes on the papers, "leaves you immediately. That must have been an unpleasant surprise."

"It was a great surprise."

"He goes to Yorkshire this week, for Christmas, and afterwards may have to return to America."

Evelyn gave an involuntary start.

Mr. Brooke raised his eyes, and then dropped them again.

"You did not know that?"

"I had not—heard."

"It is quite a sudden idea, I understand," Mr. Brooke said, with what Evelyn thought to be peculiar emphasis. "He did not know it himself before yesterday. But I mention it because the arrangements we shall discuss have been made, or suggested, in view of the possibility that Mr. Glynn may not himself be able to return here, at least for some considerable time. That is the first point. Now, as to these arrangements."

He had found the paper he was searching for, and tapped it with his pencil, with which he made notes as he went on.

"It is proper that I should begin by saying that Mr. Glynn has provided, on a very liberal scale, for all eventualities. In point of fact, he has placed in my hands a sum of money which will enable us to send to Relton, as long as it may be necessary, a man who will give the greater part of his time to the work which Mr. Glynn and yourself have so well begun. This man—a secretary—will be instructed to take up the work Mr. Glynn has in hand now, and will be at your disposal—I am desired to make that quite clear—for details such as accounts, and so on, so that you can continue all the work which you have marked out for yourself this winter. It will also be part of his duty to push forward the establishment of the Institute, and all the social side of your scheme. The question now is—and that we must decide to-day—who is to be the man? You shall have any one you like, that is," he smiled, "within reason."

His eyes were upon her face—quiet, kindly eyes, which, for all their keenness, could be gentle and sympathetic.



Evelyn did not answer for a moment.

"I think," she said at last, "that I should leave that to you. Whom do you advise? Who could come?"

Mr. Brooke took up another piece of paper.

"There are two or three who might do. But one has a prior claim—Mr. Brabant."

"He has his own district."

"We can supply some one in his place, and you might not need the whole of his time. Even if you did, that might be managed, if you wish it."

Evelyn smiled gratefully.

"You are very good to have thought of this. Of course Mr. Brabant would be far the best. He knows the people already, and they know him, and like him well."

Mr. Brooke nodded.

"Just so. You choose Mr. Brabant?"

"Please."

"That is settled, then. He will come when you like. Thursday, say."

"At your convenience."

Mr. Brooke laughed.

"No, yours. I have promised that. Let me say this: I approved the idea of Mr. Brabant because I thought him the best man for the work, but I am not responsible for the suggestion that he should come. It was Mr. Glynn's. He made it, I think, because he thought it would be most acceptable to you."

"He was quite right. Perhaps"—she paused an instant—"you will thank him for me."

Mr. Brooke bowed, and absently lifted one of his baskets of letters, and put it down again, at which Evelyn rose to go.

He left his chair and opened the door for her, with a hearty shake of the hand.

"You will feel the loss of your strong man. Such workers do not grow on every hedge, and you and Relton had some grounds to expect that he would have stayed longer. But he would not leave, I think, if he could help it. There was some necessity. There is also a hope"—he smiled, and in

his eyes there lurked a sub-twinkle that was not wholly of an official character—"he may come back, you know."

All the way to Relton these words rang in Evelyn's head like a refrain, as she reviewed the situation. It was a ray of sunshine on a dark day; a spot of blue in a clouded sky. But by degrees it faded out and left no trace. America! Was he going back to the old rough life? Then, indeed, there must be some "necessity" of which even Mr. Brabant had no notion. She speculated upon this for a time, then brought herself sternly to the present, and closed the door against all thoughts apart from work and duty. The arrangements made by Mr. Glynn—for it was clear that all was his work—would place her in a position such as no other secretary in the Society occupied. Was it right that she should accept it at his hands? But she could not refuse; and, after all, it was for the Scheme's sake—his Scheme, not hers—that it was done. Yes, it must be accepted thankfully, and by what she did with the power so generously given to her, she must prove her gratitude.

In all this Dick Brabant scarcely entered into Evelyn's thoughts at all. That he might have ambitions, ideas, hopes of his own, never once occurred to her, either now or for a long time.

When Evelyn alighted from the omnibus at the nearest point to Critchett Place, it was raining, and as she tramped over the streaming pavements, and reflected upon the visits that had to be paid before committee met, she sighed wearily. She was so tired, mentally and physically, that but for the fact that at the Committee he was to be present, and so they would meet once more, she would have longed to go quietly home, and perhaps have a plain talk with her mother about this friend who had come into her life like some great tidal wave, and gone.

But there was no room for any such thought just now, and Evelyn resolutely thrust all weariness aside, ran up the steps, and went quickly into the office. The outer door was open, as it should be, for it was only half-past twelve; but Giles was not in his room. She peeped through the folding



doors, as she hung up her cloak, and there, in the old place, sat Mr. Glynn himself.

He rose as she entered.

"Just got my balance," he said, in a cheery tone, which did Evelyn's heart good to hear, "but it was hard work. You had carried over two shillings wrong in the total last week."

Evelyn laughed. It was delightful to see and hear him in this mood. The clouds in her sky lifted, broke, and fled, and the sun shone out once more. It would be only for a little while; she knew that, but for the moment all was bright, and she determined to make the most of it while it lasted.

"It is your fault, really," she answered brightly, going to her desk and examining her diary with the list of visits and inquiries. "It is more than two months since you have allowed me to do a sum of simple addition. How can you expect me to be correct now? But what do these ticks mean? Mr. Glynn, you have been visiting my cases."

John coughed guiltily.

"Only one or two," he said; "Giles is off after the rest. It was at his suggestion that we decided you must not be allowed to go out again in the wet. It is for the last time."

The smile faded from his face, and as he stood before her, where he had so often stood, and their eyes met, both felt that the time of parting had come, and that they must go through it quickly.

John spoke first.

"You have seen Mr. Brooke; do you approve?"

"Indeed, it is the best that could have been arranged."

She spoke with her heart on her lips, thinking of what she owed to him, thinking of all that he was doing for her. But John interpreted her words differently, and they struck upon his nerves, and hardened them, as a douche of ice-cold water hardens for a moment a man whose blood is at fever-heat.

"That is well," he said mechanically. "Then I may tell Dick to-night that all is arranged for him."

"Yes; and please tell him he will be very welcome."

She spoke so naturally, that had John paused to reflect,

he must have seen that there was no feeling for her new colleague in her mind beyond good comradeship. But men in fever do not often reflect, and her words were full of significance to him.

"I will tell Dick," he said. "I will certainly tell him that. I must go out now. Giles and I lunch for the last time in the City Road at one. Then I call on the Symeses, and take tea with Joe and Amy, before I return to committee."

He spoke so quietly and naturally that Evelyn felt she did not realise what was happening in the least.

"I have not told you one piece of news," he said, after a pause. "I have bought the Warren."

"That is splendid. But—but you are going away."

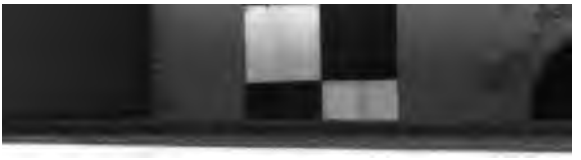
He smiled in a way she could not understand.

"Oh, I have not bought it for myself. It is to be in the hands of three trustees. I got it cheaply, on the understanding that a good round sum is to be spent in repairs, especially sanitary repairs. Mr. Brabant and Giles will be two of the trustees. Pat Malony will reside there, or close by, manage the property, under their authority, and collect the rents. Is it too much to ask if you will be the third trustee? I want that most of all."

He held out his hand, and Evelyn knew that this was his farewell. Their fingers closed, hers warm and full of life, his cold as ice, yet steady to the last.

"I will do what you wish," she said. "It is the greatest honour that has ever been given me. I only hope—I will try—to be worthy of the trust."

He made no answer, except to press her hand. A moment later he was gone, and they were not alone again.



CHAPTER XXXVII

SCOTCHED—NOT KILLED

EVERY person connected with work among the poor twenty years ago in London remembers the Mansion House Fund for the Unemployed of 1886.

The originators of the Fund were good men, whose hearts were torn with pity for the workless, and whose object was to awaken on their behalf, by plain speech and ardent appeal, the pity of the careless rich, unaccustomed at ordinary times to think and care for those in poverty and distress.

Sixty thousand pounds was collected at the Mansion House, and distributed in London by local committees, each committee, as a rule, taking as its district the area of a Poor Law Union, and being composed of clergy and ministers of all denominations, guardians of the poor, vestrymen, and representatives of local charitable bodies.

What happened is a matter of history. Mr. Brooke, in his remarks to Evelyn, was a true prophet. The appeal for funds being advertised in the public press, raised hopes among the poor which could not possibly be realised. Men crowded into the Metropolis from country districts. The pressure laid upon the local committees was enormous, and, in most cases, no adequate machinery for investigation of the *bona fides* of the applicants for help was created, or even thought necessary, so that no selection was possible of persons who could be tided over a bad time and made independent, from those who were chronically in difficulties. The just and the unjust had equal chance of receiving the benefits of the Fund if they knew a member of the committees, or could by other means press their claims. Lastly, the demand, through this lack of discrimination and organisation, was so widespread, that nearly the whole of the



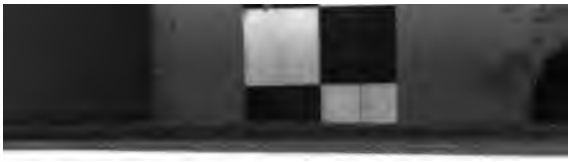
Fund was given in small sums, which did no more, even where the need was real, than to provide the recipient and his family with food for a week or two at the most. In a large majority of instances the distribution resolved itself into a scramble by tatterdemalions from the lowest quarter for "tickets" for food, which were promptly sold by auction the following Saturday night at a public house for a few glasses of ale or gin.

Yet while we are so much wiser now, as we think, and in theory, at least, insist upon "classification," "tests," and the like, and wonder, some of us, what the magnates of that generation were made of to set on foot at all such a heart-sickening and demoralising "game of grab," we must not forget that our present wisdom, so far as it goes, is to a great extent the direct result of the experience gained then, and that the majority of men and women who made the mistakes gave of their best while the pressure lasted, and if they failed to do good, failed often enough because circumstances were too strong for them, and not from lack of effort and intention to prevent harm.

In Relton public feeling was roused to its depths for a little while. A large meeting of representative men was held at the Vestry Hall, a popular member of Parliament taking the chair. Thunderous speeches were made. A powerful committee was formed for the distribution of the money. The district was divided into wards, and in each ward a separate committee was appointed to make inquiries, and to visit every person who applied for help.

No one was to be entitled to relief until a printed form, containing every particular of his poverty and circumstances had been filled in by a Ward Committee, and signed by the chairman. All persons who could obtain this guarantee from their respective Ward Committees were to receive, on the following day, at the Vestry Hall, a week's relief in food, at the hands of the Central Committee.

It was obvious to Dick, who was invited, with General Gainsborough, to attend the first meeting at the Vestry Hall, that no power on earth could control the excitement of the



local people, whose chief thought was to put in as large a claim as possible for funds to the central authorities, and when the money came, to distribute it as widely and as promptly as they could. But he was struck with the sincerity and heartiness of the men, and their evident desire to do the work on common-sense lines. One man especially attracted his notice. He was a burly person, with a big bass voice, a bushy beard, and fine presence. His name was Grobler, and Dick remembered seeing him in the Nile. He had, in fact, a large shop in Nile Street. This man it was who impressed upon the committee the need of inquiry, and emphasising the fact that he was best acquainted with the district round about Crisp Street, declared that, unless they took due precautions, they would be helping the least deserving persons in the Metropolis. He urged, therefore, that besides appointing on the committee well-known and representative men of the district, they should ask those to join who made it their business to investigate tales of distress, and who knew, best of all, how to discriminate between the whining cadger and the man in real need. At this point in his peroration he took from his breast pocket a piece of paper, and consulting it, proposed that the secretaries of the Relton Committee of the Society for the Improvement of the Condition of the Poor should be asked to join the number —Mr. Dick Brabant and Miss Evelyn Grey.

The proposition was received with murmurs of disapproval from some quarters, and with open protest from others. But Mr. Merwell, as Vicar of St. Margaret's, supported the proposition warmly, Mr. Grobler stuck to his guns, and the proposition was carried, after Dick had consented, on Evelyn's behalf and his own, to serve.

Dick was highly elated. It was the first time the Society had been directly represented upon an executive body dealing with a matter of public importance. It might be impossible to do much to stem the side of impulsive sentiment which had swept over the district, and turn it into channels productive of practical good to the deserving "Unemployed," but at least it would bring Evelyn and himself into direct



contact with men of the district of whom they knew little or nothing at present, and much might come from this later on.

When the meeting broke up, Dick made an effort to get to Mr. Grobler, but failed. Indeed, the man obviously avoided him, breaking off a conversation with a friend in order to escape. Dick let him go with a smile. He understood. The man had said he made his proposal from a sense of public duty, and he now wished his fellow-citizens to see that he had no personal connection with this accursed thing, the S. I. C. P. That would soon wear off, as they worked together on the committee. In the meantime, a piece of paper dropped from Mr. Grobler's waistcoat pocket by mistake, which Dick picked up. Upon examination it turned out to have nothing more upon it than his own name and Evelyn's, written in pencil. It was not worth anything, but Dick put it in his own pocket, as a memento of the evening.

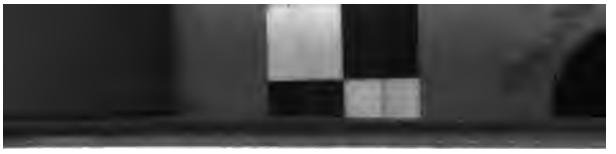
The next morning Evelyn and Giles, sitting in his room, received a full and particular account of all that passed at the meeting. Evelyn was fully as pleased as Dick himself at being upon the committee.

"This is just the opportunity we need to make friends with Relton men," she said. "I wonder how Mr. Grobler came to hear of us."

There was a movement in the other room, and Giles appeared between the folding doors. He did not speak, however, and Evelyn thought he was waiting to ask a question upon a case. Meanwhile, Dick had felt in his pocket, and brought out the paper.

"The only clue I have is this," he said, "and it does not amount to much. It fell from our champion's pocket as he left the hall to escape from me. I picked it up out of curiosity. I never saw this handwriting before. Not a common kind, either; so small, and firm, and round, yet full of character. The person who wrote that is not an ordinary Relton man."

They looked at it together, and Giles, from the folding



doors, looked at them, as he would often do, with patient watchfulness, and a question in his eyes.

Six weeks had passed since John had left the Nile, and all through January these two young people had worked as Giles had told Samuel Smith they would do, "hand in hand," morning and evening. They often stayed late, for the plans of the Institute were proceeding apace; a meeting of working men and women had been held, and a committee appointed, which met twice a week at Mr. Merwell's house. Then there were the plans for the Warren. At present the lawyers had not found Nyne's title to the property altogether clear, and no actual transference had taken place. But, by arrangement, Malony was already installed as collector of rents, and was busy finding out, and noting down, all that would have to be done and altered to make the place a decent human habitation.

In every thing concerning the property, the Institute, the daily office work, Evelyn and Dick worked together, as Giles was fain to admit, in perfect accord and harmony. Moreover, the Nile, after turning up its nose at the rather excitable and quick-voiced young man who presumed to step into the shoes of John Glynn, had soon grown used to him, and then to like him well.

Officially speaking, Giles had no cause to complain at the change, and, to do him justice, never tried to do so, but in face of the district as loyally supported Mr. Brabant as he had previously upheld the man he loved, and for whom his heart yearned daily. Nor could he say that Miss Grey had reason for dissatisfaction. Dick was punctual and business-like. A quick worker, he swept through details as a puppy laps milk, spilling a little in the process, but absorbing it all before he finished. Miss Grey was not overworked, so far as mere labour went. Yet old Giles, whose eyes saw much, and whose brain pondered deeply upon and analysed all that he saw, was sure that day by day, week by week, she was losing colour, and spirit, and health. The lines of thought and care upon her brow, which had been there even when John met her first, were growing deeply marked. She



never laughed now. At a joke from Dick, and quaint retort from himself, she would perhaps smile once or twice, only to return a minute afterwards to her work, grave and preoccupied again.

"She is pining, pining for what is her right," Giles muttered to himself, with clenched teeth. "The love of the man who loves her, the life that belongs to her, and the lack of which is just slowly killing her. I have a rare mind to write and tell him that he ought to be tried for it at the 'Old Bailey.' "

This morning, as Dick discoursed upon the advantage of working upon the Mansion House Fund Committee for Relton, Giles, as usual, had listened to the talk. It was the name of "Grobler" which raised him to keener interest than usual, and when Dick produced the piece of paper with the names, the watchfulness became active suspicion.

"May I see that, sir?" he said, "if I may be so bold."

"Rather," Dick exclaimed readily, "though it is not likely you will know the writing, for I am convinced no Relton man wrote that. It can't be Mr. Merwell's. No; I have seen his hand."

Giles took out his spectacles, and wiped the glasses slowly with the bandana handkerchief, laying down the paper on the table meanwhile. As a matter of fact, he had recognised the writing already, and his suspicion had become certain knowledge. But he wanted time to think. The writing was Percival Nyne's.

That talk some weeks ago with Samuel Smith, who was now in bed, invalided from gout, when the Superintendent had sharply and contemptuously reminded him that Nyne, in spite of his crushing defeat in the Warren, was still a power in the Nile, came back at this moment to Giles with great force. At the time he had not believed it. Now it was proved to be true. The guv'nor was indeed alive and active, and was thrusting in his hand into the Nile again—for what?

"I calls that a good hand," Giles said critically, while his thoughts flew wide and far. "A strong hand, too. The



writing of a man who knows what he's after, and is determined to get it, though the world would hold him back. I don't know, but to me there is even a bit of likeness in the way them I's and b's and m's is wrote to Mr. Glynn. Did you notice that, Miss Grey?"

As a matter of fact, Giles had no such thought; but with an impulse born of certain ideas stirring his blood and quickening his pulse until his great hand shook with excitement, he brought in John's name, and watched the effect out of the corner of his eye.

It was what he expected and hoped. Evelyn's eyes brightened at once, and a faint colour crept like the blush of a winter rose into her pale face.

"Impossible!" she cried, with an intensity which Giles had not heard in her voice for weeks. "Let me look at it again. No, no; it is nothing like his writing, not even if he had tried to disguise it. It is too fine and finicking. The man who wrote that has a very much smaller character than Mr. Glynn."

Giles coughed doubtfully.

"Maybe, maybe, miss," he said, going to the window to hide his face. "Mr. Brabant, if you do not mind, sir, I am going to keep this, for a bit. I has an idea I can trace it, after all."

Dick laughed.

"I don't want the thing. I am very glad you approve of my action," he said to Evelyn. "I was afraid I might have asked too much of you when I let them name you for the committee. You are doing so much in other ways."

"But this is of so much importance," she rejoined. "It will, of course, mean a great deal of time, and Giles must take the office work for us. I will speak to him about it now."

When she looked into the other room, however, Giles had gone. The old agent was at that moment posting up Critchett Place with long strides, toward the house occupied by Pat Malony in the Nile.

The Irishman was having dinner, but came out at once



when Giles's name was announced by one of his daughters, a bright little "colleen" of fourteen.

"Patrick, my lad," Giles said, with a queer tremble in his voice, "do you want Mr. Glynn to come back to the Nile by any chance?"

Malony gave an ecstatic shout, then cautiously shut the door.

"Mother of Heaven! Mr. Giles; don't I pray every night on my knees, then, that I may get one chance, only one, to bring him back to his own? What is it, at all, now?"

Giles's answer was to take out his pocket-book, and place the letter written to John by Percival Nyne side by side with Dick's slip of paper.

"You know the writing on that letter, maybe. Is it identical with the names on the paper? Be careful. This is a job where we must make no mistakes."

Malony looked at both, compared them a moment, and nodded.

"The same, exact. Put me on oath, and I'll swear to them as the guv'nor's own. Give me the meaning, then."

Giles sank down on a chair and made himself comfortable.

"I will tell ye, my lad, my ideas, and then you can give me yours. You know Jacob Grobler, of Nile Street? What is he?"

"A gambler," Malony said promptly, "and a spendthrift. The shop with his name on is Nyne's, and stolen goods passes through it like water through a sieve, just."

Giles nodded.

"You have it, lad, on the knuckle. Well, that man, Grobler, has put up Miss Grey and our young gentleman for the committee of the Fund that's been got up for the unemployed, and when he put 'em up, he read out their names from this."

Malony showed his teeth like a dog.

"Sure, it's another trap of Nyne's. He will revenge on her what he has had from him. He will kill her."



"He will not," Giles cried, with a sudden passion. "Let him look to himself."

Malony laughed gleefully.

"Bedad, but it's good to see the face of ye, Mr. Giles, whin there's a word of danger to our darlin'. Divil a bit shall he harm her sweet face. But it's Mr. Glynn himself must handle the business."

"Well said," Giles cried, with a chuckle. "You and I Pat, are cousins, I can see, over this. Now what is up, precisely? That is the first point."

Pat shook his head.

"I'll not say. There's many a way of doing this he'll be after, and, fearing that something may get wind, he will not tell a sowl this time except Grobler, and I doubt if he'll know. I must get a 'nose,' Mr. Giles—Billy the fake, if I can find him—and search out where the guv'nor is going, and whom he goes among."

"You do, lad. But keep this in your head: There will be such a mob after this Fund as none of us ever saw; the committee will make no inquiry worth a straw; every Tom, Dick, and Harry will get relieved. Half the Nile will be drunk, and all the Warren. My opinion is, that when they comes up for their money, they will break into the Town Hall; so, while you gets your 'nose,' I'll go to Mr. Smith. After which, Pat, my man, and before we goes a step further, I writes to Mr. Glynn."



CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE UNEMPLOYED

THE distribution of the Mansion House Fund in Relton was to take place at the Relton Vestry Hall.

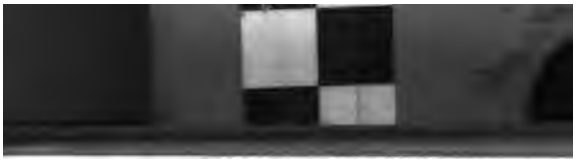
This building fronted upon a thoroughfare, and was of considerable extent. The main entrance was in the street, but on one side, for some two hundred feet, stretched a yard twenty feet in breadth, paved with stone, and flanked by a high wall. This yard was within iron gates, and led from the road to a flight of steps in the rear of the building at the top of which was a door opening into a room seldom used by the Vestry, and which was placed at the disposal of the Relton Mansion House Fund Committee.

A passage from the committee room ran across the building to another outer door, which opened into a back street, and, by arrangement, the whole of the offices of the Vestry were thus shut off from this passage during the hours the M. H. F. Committee were at work, providing the Relief Committee with separate premises. The place was well built, the walls of great thickness, and the doors of solid oak, and very heavy.

At three o'clock on a Thursday afternoon the committee opened its doors to admit the first batch of recommended applicants.

The gates of the yard had been set open, and a notice affixed directing persons with properly signed "forms" to assemble at the door at the top of the flight of steps.

The result was that the committee, when entering by the front door of the hall, found that upwards of two hundred people were waiting in the yard, and that when a diminutive, half-starved clerk, one of the "unemployed" himself, unlocked the door, there was a rush, and into a small ante-



room, upon which the door opened, were propelled a dozen perspiring, much tousled people, while from the steps and the yard below came the sharp cries, gurgles, and acrid vituperation of the crowd crushing and fighting its way upwards.

Happily, the clerk, though small, was quick and courageous. Before those struggling on the steps could get in, he deftly closed the door in their faces and locked it. The result was a prolonged groan of indignation and the hammering of fists against the door.

The committee, which had assembled in full force, sprang to its feet in a panic, and when a burly labourer came in for his tickets with a bleeding face, caused by a scratch from the nails of a very stout lady with whom he had collided in the doorway, several gentlemen, scenting danger and general unpleasantness, decamped there and then. Those that remained were unnerved, and called upon the chairman to send some one for the police. But at this juncture, Dick, at a glance from Evelyn, raised his voice clearly and decisively.

"There is not the least need for the police, or any protection at all. The poor folk are only impatient with waiting—several of them have been there half an hour in the rain. If we reason with them quietly, let in as many as we can at a time, and stop the crushing on the steps, it will be all right."

"Will it, indeed?" cried a stout vestryman, sarcastically. "Then p'r'aps you'll go and do the reasoning. To my mind, it's murdering work, and unless the police is here to stop here, I'm off. That's straight."

Dick laughed cheerfully.

"Then be off," he cried, going to the door. "That's straight, too. I will make myself responsible for the whole business if some other man will help me."

There was no response.

As if in answer to the words, there came another groan, which sounded blood-curdling to the nervous committeemen, and the thumping of the door was renewed.

At this threat the stout man made for the inner door without more ado, and there would have been a general stampede had not Evelyn, her eyes shining with excitement, gone over to Dick, and stood beside him.

"I think you have made a mistake, Mr. Brabant," she said, in her clear voice. "This is work better fitted for a woman than a man. Allow me to go with you." Then in a low voice: "We must do it; they are all cowards."

But they were not. A loud protest arose at Evelyn's proposal, and three men came forward with a rush. But Evelyn held her ground.

"Thank you, I am going out," she said. "There are women in that crowd; I must see that they are treated properly. Now, Mr. Brabant, I am at your service."

Dick made his arrangements quickly. The committeemen who were not afraid, or who said they were not, were asked to help the chairman—a clergyman, who alone stood his ground firmly from the first—to give the relief as fast as it could be managed. Dick and Evelyn, with the little clerk to aid them, were to meet the crowd.

"Open the door," Dick said to the little man. "Then get out of the way, quick." He obeyed, and in burst more people, filling the ante-room in a moment. Through these Dick threaded his way, and in cheerful tones ordered the men on the steps to stand back.

The sound of the voice of authority, and the appearance of a member of the committee at the door, caused a sudden lull. Dick then spoke kindly and sympathetically to the crowd, assuring them that they would be dealt with as speedily as possible, and intimating that any approach to violence would bring the police on the scene, and probably stop all relief work for the day. His words had effect for the time, and the ante-room was filled to its utmost capacity without further jostling. Then the doors were closed again.

But the trouble was not over. In a minute or two, and long before the people now within the building had received their allowances, and taken their departure by the door at the other side of the Vestry Hall, a deeper and more menac-



ing groan than ever arose from the yard itself, upon which more committee-men disappeared. Only two men were now left, besides the chairman, one being Mr. Merwell, the other Mr. Grobler, from the Nile.

Evelyn, who had watched Dick's action in the first place without taking any part in it herself, now quietly put on her cloak.

"Yes, I am going out," she said, in answer to an anxious question from him; "and I think I shall stay there. This must be stopped. Come, too, if you will, but please let me go first."

Dick's heart beat heavily. He did not like this at all. When on the steps before, he had noticed an ugly group of men in the yard. He was sure that they would be on the steps now.

"Open the door, if you please," Evelyn said to the clerk, "but not wide. I do not intend to let in many at present."

The clerk went to obey, but caught Dick's eye as he did so, and shook his head. Then he opened half the door quickly, at which a man who was vigorously kicking at it that instant plunged forward, lost his balance, and fell headlong, almost upon Evelyn. Dick's nerves could not stand this. He saw behind, on the steps, a group of hard, angry faces, and believed Evelyn was in real danger; so, without a word, just as she was about to confront those on the steps, he threw his arm around her, intending to draw her back out of harm's way and take her place.

But he handled steel. With all her strength she resisted him—and she was very strong—and contriving to keep her place by clinging to the door, she turned her head to whisper:

"Let me go, instantly. I know what I am doing, and I am going to do it."

He obeyed her, and she confronted the men who were striving with their shoulders to get through the door.

"You will please make room for me," she said.

Again the voice of a person who was definite and determined had its due effect, and, coming from one with Evelyn's presence, was decisive. By common consent there



was a backward heave, a shuffle of feet, and Evelyn stood among them on the steps.

"Close the door behind me," she said to Dick, over her shoulder, "and see that it is not opened until I give instructions."

He passed the order on to the clerk, and stood with her on the steps, facing the crowd. His heart was very bitter within him, and had it not been for the danger of it, he could have wished that she might find herself helpless. But Evelyn was perfectly confident of herself.

"I have come out to ask you, gentlemen," she said, "to help me get the women who are here this afternoon out of the cold and wet, especially those who have babies in arms. I shall want six volunteers, and the rest to stand aside to make room. May I ask you, sir, to be the leader?"

She spoke slowly and distinctly, and all that she said was heard half-way down the yard. The last words were addressed to a navvy, with herculean shoulders, and an honest, good-tempered face.

He answered promptly:

"Right you are, miss. Some will say they've waited longer nor the ladies, but I sez, let 'em up. Jim, mate, you'll say same as me, I know."

He nudged another navvy, standing next him, who nodded assent, and the force of example being great, Evelyn had her half-dozen helpers in no time.

"Thank you," she cried, with her brightest smile. "Now if this gentleman will keep the steps clear, I shall ask the rest to go down with me. You will do it, won't you?" she said, in a lower tone, to Dick.

"Of course," he said, disarmed at once by the appeal. Then he spoke in his turn:

"Come, friends, who will hold the fort with me, and who's for the lion's den?"

A grin went round, and the men nearest shouldered up to him, while the rest, with the big navvy leading the way, followed Evelyn down the steps.

Great was the surprise of the people in the yard, when



Evelyn, with her body-guard of three, came among them, friendly but fearless, to state her purpose and intention. There is nothing so quick to change its humour as a London crowd, and in a very few minutes the people who had groaned loudest, and indulged in the most fearsome threats against the Vestry hall windows and the members of the committee, who had kept them shivering for hours on a cold, sleeting, February afternoon, began chaffing one another right and left, and passing complimentary remarks upon the appearance and behaviour of the "lady of the Fund."

A minority there were who growled and grumbled ominously, and Evelyn might have been hustled after all, but for the expression upon the navvy's face at her elbow, and the uncomfortable breadth of his shoulders. As it was, there was no rudeness at all, and it was not long before the steps were covered with women, and the weaker, older men, who, presently, under Dick's guidance, passed quietly and without any jostling into the ante-room, to receive their relief from the committee, which was now completely reassured. By six o'clock all had been dealt with, and Evelyn and Dick, tired out, but well satisfied with their afternoon's work, went back to 19 Critchett Place.

"We shall have no more trouble now," Dick said hopefully. "Your special constables have volunteered to help us every afternoon for a shilling a head, and I have engaged them for the week. It was a brilliant stroke of yours to make them volunteer."

"I could not have done it without your help," Evelyn said. "Only you do see now, do you not, that I was justified in going my own way? I am afraid I was ungrateful, for you meant to save me from annoyance; but I was so angry at being treated like a child."

Dick coloured to the tips of his ears.

"It is I who must apologise. But I don't want you to misunderstand. I did not think you childish, or incapable. It was simply that when I saw those fellows on the steps, looking, as I thought, really dangerous, I became maddened



with anxiety. Do not forget that, if one of them had touched you, I should have brained him where he stood."

He spoke with sharp, reckless emphasis, for his nerves were shaken still. Then he sprang up the steps of No. 19, and opened the door for her.

No one was in the office. Giles had gone. Evelyn went into her room and turned up the gas, Dick following, with intent to pick up a bag he had left there, and go home, for it was too late to do any more work. But as he entered Evelyn looked at him, and he saw that she wanted to speak. Her face was deeply flushed, and she was biting her lips, as though under some strong emotion. He felt a thrill of suspense, and stood and waited, with beating heart.

"Mr. Brabant, I have something I must say to you, though I hardly know how to say it. But you have been so good to me to-day, and not only to-day, but ever since—ever since you came to help Mr. Glynn in Relton, that now, after what you have just said, I must speak plainly, at any cost."

She paused a moment, and seemed to brace herself, then her mouth became firm, and her eyes steady, yet he saw that they were full of tears.

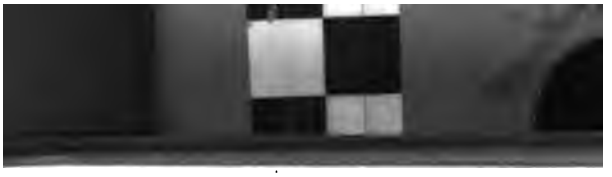
"Once, long ago—years, years ago, it seems—you told me that you cared for me. I do not recollect all I said, but I remember that I told you it was impossible. Did I not?"

He bowed, without speaking.

"Afterwards—forgive me if I hurt you, but I want to tell the truth—I think I almost forgot that you had ever spoken, or that we had ever been anything but friends. Do you understand?"

"I understand."

"And so, when Mr. Glynn suggested—or was it I?—that you might help with the Institute, and be its leader, I thought only of what value your power and work would be to us. I did not think of you. Then, when you came, while Mr. Glynn was here, all went so well and so naturally, I thought everything was over in your mind. And when Mr. Brooke said you might come when Mr. Glynn left us, I was so glad. But since, at times, I have wondered whether I was not blind



and mistaken, and whether it was not wronging you cruelly. Yet I could not tell, and so I put the thought away again. But now, I feel we must not go on in this way longer. I want you to tell me, please—have you put all thought of me in that old way aside, have you given up utterly and entirely all idea that I could be anything but just your friend? Tell me that, now, upon your honour."

She was trembling, and her voice dropped almost to a whisper; she saw the answer plainly in his face. She saw what he was feeling; she saw what she had done.

Yet Dick was quiet enough. There was neither anger nor surprise, nor the least vestige of reproach in his voice as he replied.

"I will tell you," he said. "I did accept what you answered when I spoke, and for a time believed you out of reach. But it did not last. Hope came again, and the feeling that if I could only serve you and work with you, aid you in some great cause on which your heart was set, I might some day—some day—make you turn to me. It was when John first asked me if I would help you in the Nile that I thought this. I had no right to hope, but I could not help it. And it was such an opportunity that he gave me, dear old John."

Evelyn started.

"He gave you!" she repeated. "Did he—did Mr. Glynn know that you still cared for me, and that you came because you cared?"

She spoke in a low tone, and with all her strength strove to speak quietly; but her heart was beating so that her voice trembled, and Dick noticed it.

"Yes," he answered, wondering, "he knew. Let me explain that," he added quickly: "we are not only friends, brothers almost, but once, some years ago, I saved his life, and when he came to England he found out all that I was feeling, and, without telling me, made up his mind to help me to my heart's desire. I soon found it out, of course, and, being hopeful, I accepted all that he was going to do. But you will not, you must not, blame him. All the pre-



sumption and the mistake are mine—mine alone—remember that."

He spoke earnestly, and drew near to her; for at his words she sank back into her chair, and covered her face with her hands.

The room was very still for a few moments. Then Evelyn raised her head.

"Thank you," she said simply. "Oh, I understand. I am only sorry, so very, very sorry. Now if you do not mind, I will go home. I don't think I can bear any more to-day."

She rose as she spoke, brushed away the tears that were upon her cheek, and gave him her hand, with an April smile. Dick took it reverently, held it a moment, then put it to his lips, and left the room.



CHAPTER XXXIX

UNDER HEEL

GILES was very anxious. He had written to John, telling him that Nyne was on the war-path again, that there was danger for Evelyn, and asking whether he could come up at once. He had received no reply. But this was not the worst. Three mornings after his letter went, John wrote from Liverpool, not alluding to Giles's letter, but saying that he had given up the idea of settling in Yorkshire, and had decided to return to America. The letter was short and precise, and Giles, knowing his man, turned cold as he read it. He might actually have gone by this time; the address given was only an hotel. Meanwhile matters were very serious in the Nile. Malony could get no information whatever of Nyne's movements. He had not been to the Warren since the fight there. No one had seen him in the Nile. There was no evidence to be obtained from any quarter that his hand was moving in this matter of the unemployed. Yet this very absence of all direct evidence made Giles and Malony the more suspicious.

"He is a snake, Mr. Giles," the Irishman said; "the very divil of a snake. I tould Mr. Glynn that, the first time ever we met, and said to him, sez I, 'While the skull-face lives, there will be no safety from him, even though he is beat into the very earth.' "

Giles grunted.

"If you told him that, he will remember it, and as soon as he gets my letter he will come. This will be all right."

But day after day went by, and John neither came nor wrote. Then Giles began to wire right and left; to the hotel in Liverpool, to Yorkshire, to John's solicitor in London.

From the last source he heard that John was believed to



be still in England, but that his movements were uncertain, and he had left instructions that no letters on matters of business should be forwarded until he sent an address, or called.

The last words formed the only hope left to Giles, and he went round to the lawyers, and arranged then and there a telegraphic code of his own, by which, if he wired a certain word, and they knew Mr. Glynn's whereabouts, they could send him to the office; if another word, to the Relton Vestry Hall.

Meantime, from sources entirely outside the Nile, information came which increased Giles's anxieties tenfold. This was the news of what happened at the first distribution of the Fund, and two interviews of his own with the police.

Dick told him about the special constables, and said that the committee had decided unanimously to refuse an offer of protection made by the police, and to leave the whole control of the crowd to him and to Miss Grey. Giles said nothing in reply, but went off there and then to Mr. Samuel Smith. He found him not only in bed with gout, but too ill to be seen, and when, getting pencil and paper, Giles sent in an urgent message, the reply came back that he was to go to Inspector Halkin, in whose hands all responsibility now lay, and leave a statement in writing with him. With a heavy heart, Giles posted off to King's Cross, saw that gentleman, and told his errand. Halkin was polite, but very much on his dignity. He showed Giles a letter from the Relton Committee of the Mansion House Fund declining police protection. He pointed out what Giles knew to be true, that there were other relief centres in the division to be watched, and that great pressure was put upon the force just now. He promised to do all he could, should any emergency arise, and received, though without thanks, the statement which Giles, acting at the hint from Mr. Smith, had written out of the danger which he feared "from information received," namely, that the Vestry Hall would be mobbed by the scum of the Nile.



But Giles, who had known the Inspector for years, and tested him more than once, saw plainly that he was not to be depended upon in any case, and that if Nyne had got at him—which was more than probable—he would, this time, prevent the least chance of the police appearing on the scene in time.

No wonder, then, that the old man went about his work these dark February days with heavy heart. He was continually haunting the street where the Vestry Hall stood, and every afternoon at three he inspected for himself the nature and bearing of the crowd at the gates and within the yard.

It is needless to say that by this time all Evelyn's friends in the Nile were on the alert. Amy was now daily expecting the birth of her child, so that Joe could do little; but Tom Symes, after a consultation with his wife, marched into Malony's house and offered his services.

"I ain't much good spying round," the big man said, with one of his great laughs; "there's a sight too much of me for that, but Kate and I have made it up that I will quit work until that blooming money they are scattering down the gutters is all gone. So, Patrick, my boy, I just looked in to tell ye that I am off to the Vestry Hall."

"Sure, you can't do a better thing," the Irishman said. "Do you know any of the officials at all? Just so as ye'll be getting their confidence, belike."

Tom winked furiously.

"Is that to be my game? No, I don't know 'em; but I will, every mother's son, before dinner-time. And if there's a door in that place I can't get through afterwards, or don't know my way to, my joker, then I was never born in or bred in the Nile, nor trained in my innercent youth by the smartest cracksman in London. And you know who I mean. So long. If you want the eighty-one-tonner, Pat, call at the Vestry Hall."

This offer—a most valuable one—came the fourth day of the Fund, and, as it turned out, only just in the nick of time.



Three days had the committee met, and performed their duties quietly and in peace. During three whole afternoons Evelyn and Dick, with their six special constables, had received, marshalled, and controlled the hundred and fifty to two hundred people who tramped into the yard with recommendation forms, to receive a week's relief. There had been no trouble, and no disorder. The amateur police did their duty with excellent tact and temper, and, where their own friends were concerned, with an adamantine firmness beyond praise. Dick and Evelyn, meanwhile, walked or stood among the waiting people, and made friends with them, and learnt more of the inwardness of the "unemployed" movement in these few days, from the workman's point of view, than the gentlemen who wrote articles for the daily papers on the subject, and the great persons at the Central Offices, had ever done in their lives.

The fear of riot or violence died away altogether, and though there were not many of the committee present for the relief-giving, it was because they did not find it interesting, rather than from any other reason. Mr. Merwell, the chairman, and Mr. Jacob Grobler were unfailing in their attendance, and no more were needed for the work.

The fourth day the committee were short-handed. The chairman had influenza—he had been really ill for some days—and Mr. Grobler wrote that he had urgent business out of town. When Evelyn and Dick arrived at two o'clock, they found only Mr. Merwell there. As it was necessary that two people should distribute—one to examine the forms, the other to count out the tickets—Evelyn took her place in the committee-room, and Dick, with his men, controlled the crowd alone.

Nothing happened for an hour. A smaller number than usual took their places in the yard, and Dick thought that he was going to have an idle afternoon. But at three a sudden influx of people began. They did not come in a crowd, but by a few at a time, and at first there seemed nothing unusual going on. Presently, however, when Dick came out



of the committee-room, having been absent a few minutes from the yard, he found an ominous change in affairs. All the neat, orderly line of applicants, who had been so placed as they entered that each who came first would be first served, were breaking up, and a compact body of fifty men, of sinister appearance, were silently forcing their way to the door. There was no commotion or horse-play, which was the worst sign of all, but with a united pressure that could not be resisted, and a contemptuous disregard of the protests and orders of the "specials," which pointed to a preconcerted plan, the mob—for a mob it clearly was—made its way down the yard, crushed back and put to the wall all the genuine unemployed, and swept up the flight of steps. But for the quickness and devotion of his men, Dick himself would have been caught in the stream, and, as it turned out afterwards, severely handled, if not killed. He was told that he was wanted at the gates, and it was intended to trip him up and maltreat him before he could get back. But just as he was going to start, two of his men who had been caught themselves, shouted a warning, and Dick sprang back to the steps, fought his way past three roughs who tried to stop him, and with two of his own men, dashed through the door above. But he could not close it. The danger to the mob of being shut out had been provided against. Some one, just before the attack began, had placed a wedge in both the doors. When Dick and the two "specials" retreated to the committee-room, the crowd followed close upon their heels, and before there was time to give the alarm, the inner door of the room was locked inside, and the one or two people who were receiving tickets from Mr. Merwell were hustled back, pushed through the ante-room, and down the steps again into the yard. In the meantime some one had closed the outer gates of the yard and locked them, so that no person could get out, while the one "special" who had originally been placed there was caught by many hands and hauled away too quickly for any cry he might give for help to be heard in the street. Nor would it have been of much avail if he had been free, for in all the length and breadth of that



thoroughfare—the principal street of Relton—there was not, at that time, a policeman to be found.

Before Dick had time to warn his friends of what was happening, therefore, their escape was cut off, and the table behind which Mr. Merwell and Evelyn sat was surrounded by a scowling crowd of hooligans and roughs.

The Vicar of St. Margaret's was a brave man.

"Well, my lads," he said calmly, "what do you want with us?"

"Money, and them tickets," answered a sullen voice. "You hand over, mister, before we does for her."

Mr. Merwell's face flamed. "Cowards," he exclaimed hotly, losing his temper; "let me see a man of you dare to touch the lady. Fools! why, the police will be here in a moment, and every one who uses violence——" But he got no further.

His words were drowned by a roar of foul abuse, and a tall lad close by struck him a heavy blow in the face. It was the signal for a general assault. Dick, however, having seen what was coming, had armed himself with a heavy ruler, and now returned the hooligan's blow with interest, and cheered his men on to defend Miss Grey. They responded pluckily, and for a moment the assailants held back, while Dick dragged Evelyn swiftly into a corner, and the table after her. This he turned over on end, so that it made a slight barricade. Meantime the foremost roughs, seeing the tickets pouring on to the floor, made a dash for them, which gave Dick another respite. But it only lasted a minute. "The money is not there," cried a rasping voice; "it's in the woman's clothes."

It was Nyne's voice. He was in the centre of the crowd, where he could see and control. Evelyn caught his eye, and a deep fear came to her heart, which she had never felt before. He looked horribly ill. His face was ashen grey, and blue veins stood out like cords in his neck and temples; but he was smiling an evil grin, while his eyes coolly moved from side to side as he held his men in hand. It was his last stroke. He knew what the consequences were likely to



be; but he had risked all for the power to crush the person whom he now considered to be the mainspring of all his misfortunes. This time, come what might, he would not fail.

In an instant the table was thrust aside, as Dick and his workmen, and Mr. Merwell—who was struggling manfully, in spite of a black eye and cut forehead—were assailed by twenty hooligans. But while Dick, fighting with the strength of ten, kept at bay for one minute's space the brutal hands clutching at Evelyn, there came a dull grinding sound from the inner door in the hall leading to the vestry offices; then a sharp, reverberating report of a revolver, a thunderous crash of splintering wood, and the door, the lock of which had been shattered by a bullet, was dashed inwards, and Tom Symes, and John himself, followed by Joe, Malony, and Giles, threw themselves upon the crowd. They spent no breath in threats, but, with rigid faces, struck right and left, and at every blow a man went down. A terrified howl greeted their appearance, and without attempting resistance, the mob made a mad rush for the outer door. In a few moments most of the room was clear, and John was at Evelyn's side. He could not speak, though his lips moved; but when Dick cried out, "She is not hurt," the tension in his face relaxed.

"Thank God!" he answered, speaking in a curiously quiet tone. "But she has been frightened."

He did not look at Evelyn, but stared at Dick, and the concentrated passion in his face made her shudder. She held out her hand to greet him now, but he did not take it. "They shall pay," he muttered in a dull voice; and swiftly turning on his heel, he strode to the struggling mass at the outer door.

Here Tom Symes was in his glory. The panic inside had been so desperate, while from without men were pressing in to share the loot they had been promised, that the door was blocked, and a dozen men had turned at bay in self-defence. These the eighty-one-tonner was dealing with in a manner that did credit to his professional skill. Beside him were Giles and Joe Cramp, not much less formidable, while Malony



lithe and active, whirling a life-preserver round his head like a shillelagh, cracked the sconces of every hooligan he could reach. When John joined them, and took his share, the pressure from within became so tremendous that those without were thrust violently forth, and in a squirming mass were swept through the ante-room and rolled headlong down the steps into the yard below.

A hideous yell of rage from the roughs outside greeted this defeat; and when they saw that it came from a handful of fighting men, and not from the police, they were ready, out of sheer vengefulness, to storm the place once more. In such an emergency, however, a leader is required. Had Nyne been in the yard below, and hounded them on, they would have charged, a hundred strong. But he was inside, and they hesitated. The nearest quailed before Tom Symes, who now stood on the top step, laughing and baring his great arms; the furthest paused when at the side of the eighty-one-tonner they saw the champion himself.

John spoke to Tom in a low tone.

"Can you keep them here? I have to deal with Nyne. I shall not be long."

The eighty-one-tonner gave a savage laugh.

"I'll hold 'em. You go back to him."

Nyne was in the committee-room, in the grasp of Joe, who had sprung upon him as he tried to escape by the inner door, and was now holding him in silence, like a bulldog that has pinned his master's enemy. The man was on his knees, feebly struggling in the grip of the young locksmith. When he saw John, he sprang up, with a scream, and made one last effort to escape. The movement was so sudden and unexpected, that Joe lost hold for an instant; but he would have regained it, had not John motioned him aside, and caught the man by neck and breast.

"He will kill him now," Dick said, in a quiet voice to Evelyn.

"Impossible!" she exclaimed. "It would be murder."

"He will," was the grim reply. "And so would I, twice over."



But Evelyn did not hear him. She had started forward, and caught John by both wrists.

"Let him go," she cried. "You must."

He did not seem to hear her, and she saw that he was tightening his hold.

"Stop! Stop, for my sake."

The words were uttered in a broken whisper. She hardly knew what she was saying, and was only conscious that by some means—any means—she must hold him back.

He heard her now, and the agony of her appeal brought him to himself. His face changed, his fingers loosened their hold.

"For your sake, then," he answered, in a dull voice.

An ominous sound now came from without. The men had growled a threatening answer to Tom's defiance. A storm was gathering fast. John perceived the danger, and an idea struck him.

"Joe, open the windows."

His voice had recovered tone, his face was quiet and composed, as he changed his hold of Nyne, lifting him up breast-high. When the windows were thrown open, he crossed the room, making no more of his burden than if he were holding a baby.

His intention was now manifest, and Evelyn held her breath; but John smiled reassuringly as he passed.

"I am not going to hurt him much," he said.

Beneath the window was an area, six feet in width, guarded by iron railings, beyond the railings the crowd, closely packed.

John sprang on the broad window-ledge, Nyne striving with him desperately.

"Would you torture as well as kill?" he cried hoarsely. "Those railings are spiked."

But John made him no answer. He stood a moment, looking in silence at the crowd, which stared back at him, gaping, expectant, then, exerting all his strength, he gave the writhing body a mighty swing, and cast it out across



the area, clear of the railings; so that it fell on the heads of the crowd, unhurt.

Then John spoke, and every word was heard by those in the yard.

"You have him back who brought you here. Go home."

The words, and the face of the man who said them, had a mesmeric effect upon the crowd. The threats died on their lips. Slowly they turned, forced open the iron gates, and slunk away.

"That was well done," cried old Giles from the committee-room. "Mr. Glynn, you've finished them to rights."

"Not yet, Alfred," said a quiet voice behind him. "I shall have my turn."

Giles gave a cry of surprise, for there stood Mr. Samuel Smith, looking as well and hearty as if no such an ailment as gout had ever been invented.

"It is all over," added the Superintendent, in answer to the old agent's exclamation; "I am on duty. Inspector Halkin is relieved."



CHAPTER XL

"FAILURE"

PERCIVAL NYNE was only a little bruised and shaken by his fall, but the shock to his nervous system brought on a stroke of paralysis. He gradually lost the use of his limbs, and for the rest of his life was a helpless invalid.

At the Vestry Hall there was much handshaking and many greetings. In the midst of these Dick drew John aside.

"I want you to do me a favour, old man. Evelyn is tired out—utterly spent; you must take her home. I have sent a man to get a cab."

"You will do that," John replied. "I have only come here to see this business through. I sail to-morrow for New York."

"You never told me that—why?"

"I only made up my mind a few days ago."

Dick gave a quick shake of the head, and John saw that he was changed. There was a new force about him. He looked years older. "That makes no difference," Dick replied. "I cannot leave the place. I ask you to do this as a favour to me."

Their eyes met; and then, before John could reply, Giles put in his word. He had overheard all that had been said.

"The cab has come, sir," he said to John, "and Miss Grey is a-waiting for you."

Evelyn was, indeed, tired out. It was all she could do to walk, leaning on John's arm, to the cab, and if it had not been for an unexpected incident, she always said afterwards that she would have fainted. Before they reached the street, however, her attention was fully roused by something which made her forget herself.



The presence of Mr. Samuel Smith had brought two score of constables to the Vestry Hall, at which a crowd collected on the spot, to see what fun was going. It soon became known, and spread like wild-fire, that there had been a riot over the "Fund," that hard fighting had taken place, and the committee had been in danger. As a natural consequence, by the time Evelyn reached the front entrance of the Vestry Hall, there had gathered a concourse of people, who overran the pavement, stopped the traffic, and made it necessary for the police to clear the road. This crowd was largely recruited from the Nile, and when John, with Evelyn, and accompanied by Tom Symes, Pat Malony, and Giles, walked down the broad flight of steps, a murmur arose; and when a small youth of twelve years, Crisp Street bred, yelled lustily, "The champion! look! and the eighty-one-tonner—hi!" it swelled into a mighty cheer.

John was much annoyed, and would have hurried into the cab with all speed; but Tom Symes struck his hand into his old antagonist's, and slapping him heartily on the back, called out, in stentorian tones:

"The champion he is—our champion too—come back to the Nile, so let's have it again, with three times three."

There was no stopping the crowd now. Cheer after cheer broke out, and when at last John managed to tear himself from Tom, and get Evelyn into the cab, the footway had to be kept clear by a dozen constables.

But the excitement did Evelyn good, and as the startled horse dashed off at a rattling pace, she laughed with something of the brightness of former days.

"This is your welcome. How good it is to hear them! At last 'the Snag' is gone, and the river clear."

John smiled faintly.

"There is that in it, certainly. You and Mr. Brabant will have no more trouble now."

Evelyn drew herself up, with a sudden compression of the lips, which he saw and wondered at; and there was a short silence. Then she said:



"Mr. Brabant will not be working in Relton after next week. He told me so to-day."

John drew a quick breath.

"Dick—leaving! Why?"

She could have smiled at the question, if she had been in any humour to smile at anything. It was spoken in the old, abrupt tone she had not heard for months. Then she grew suddenly timid. "Mr. Brabant would wish to tell you, perhaps."

He was silent a moment, staring straight in front of him.

"Will you please tell me yourself?"

"If you wish, I will."

Her voice was very low, yet steady. She had a curious feeling that it was quite natural for them to be talking about this.

"I do wish it, if I am not asking for too much."

There was another silence, as the cab rattled and shook over the stones of the New North Road.

"Mr. Brabant and I are friends of some standing," she said presently, in the same tone, "and many months ago he told me something about himself, which I believe you know."

"Yes."

"I answered definitely, and, as I thought, finally, in the negative. But it seems he did not think so. And because of this—of his belief that I might change—he came to Relton, to the Institute, with you." Her voice was not quite so steady now as it had been, but she did not pause. "Three days ago he did something—never mind what—which angered me. I was very rude to him, and afterwards, when I apologised, he said words which betrayed his purpose here. That is the reason why he must go away, and wishes to do so. I cannot tell you any more, except——" She paused now, and John, turning slowly to look at her, saw that her face was flushed and her lips trembling. "——Except that I don't think you acted justly or reasonably, either towards him or towards me. You should not have set your will to accomplish such a purpose. You have failed, and rightly failed."



The cab went on, and on, slowly climbing upwards to the heights of Hampstead, through narrow streets lined with shabby houses; up broad roads, lit with flaring shops. Meanwhile, within the cab there was a deep silence after Evelyn's words.

At first she felt thankful for this. The impulse to tell him what she felt about the miserable misunderstanding, of which he had been the chief cause, had been too strong to be resisted; but no sooner had she done so, than a sharp reaction came, and she wondered at her boldness, and dreaded what he might reply. It was a relief that he said nothing. But in a little while, when, glancing at him, she saw that he was sitting with bowed head, a white, still face, and sad and weary eyes, her feeling changed, and she longed for him to speak, even if what he said were harsh or angry.

At length he moved, and she saw him rest his head upon his hand.

"Yes," he said; "you speak the truth. I have failed, and no punishment can be too great for me. My poor old Dick!"

He groaned to himself, and seemed to forget her presence for a little while. But when she changed her position, and leant back, he turned.

"This is the last time we may ever meet," he said, in a different tone. "I am returning to the States by the next boat. I should like to say a word upon my own account. I want to thank you for what you have done now, and, most of all, for what you have been to me these months that we have worked together."

He was looking at her with an expression in his eyes that brought tears into her own—scalding tears. She made a quick gesture of dissent.

"Do not go on, please. I have done nothing, but you have saved my life twice. You have worked for me, thought for me, inspired me, and my gratitude has been to reproach you for what, after all, I have no right to judge, and cannot judge. No, if you will persist in saying you owe anything to me"—she gave a low, tremulous laugh—"then I must



begin to compose a pretty, well-constructed speech of gratitude for what I owe to you."

He smiled at this, one of the old quiet smiles, and then jerked his head away, as if he could not meet her eyes.

"I could not stand that. It does not matter much, though, if you can understand."

He leant back, too, now, and half-closed his eyes, and a chill feeling of coming separation struck Evelyn, until she shivered under the warm cloak she wore. This was followed by a wave of hot indignation at the perverse fate which was holding them apart, they who had been so much to one another, and might be still, if only those miserable words of hers could be buried in the sea. But words, once spoken, cannot be buried. They can only be undone by action, and in this instance action was impossible. Yet something must be attempted.

"Mr. Glynn, will you answer a question of mine?"

"Anything you wish to ask."

"Why do you go away? Why do you give up all that you have founded in the Nile, and which must now fail and die. If I am impertinent," she added hastily, for she saw him wince, "you need not answer me. Perhaps I should not have asked. I am again interfering in that which is really no business of mine, but I do it for the sake of the Nile."

He looked at her. She was leaning forward as the cab went slowly up a quiet road—for they were nearly in Hampstead now—between great trees, through the bare branches of which the moon was shining.

"I do not know," he said slowly, "whether I can answer you, except it is to repeat what you said, that I have failed. When a man feels that as keenly as I feel it, he goes away and hides his head until, some day, somewhere else, he gets up and tries again to do his duty."

Evelyn's eyes filled with tears.

"I wish I had never spoken," she cried passionately. "I wish you would forget. It is only in this one way that you have failed. In everything else you have succeeded. We



are all so proud of you. The Nile loves you. You have conquered or crushed what is bad there, and made your own all that is good. Failed! Why, never has any one succeeded as you have done, and yet you throw away all that you have won—for—for——"

"I have not done it yet."

There was a different ring in his voice now, and a light flashed suddenly into his eyes which made Evelyn turn her head. Then the cab drew up with a jerk. They were at their journey's end.

John paid the cabman, and opened the gate for her.

"Good-bye," he said, in a voice that sounded far away as the stars, with the wintry night between.

Evelyn shivered again. Then their hands met.

"Mother would like to see you."

"You are too tired."

"Not now."

She turned from him swiftly, and John followed her up the path between the flower beds and the lawn all wrapt in snow.

The door was opened by Mrs. Grey, and her greeting of the visitor did Evelyn's heart good to see. While supper was served, Mrs. Grey had him to herself for a few minutes, and thanked him simply for all he had done.

"I know you think nothing of this yourself," she said at the end, before he could reply. "You are one of those who help others as naturally as most men help themselves. But you must allow me to have my opinion, and to express it."

John sighed.

"I wish I deserved your kind words. I have tried, but where I ought to have done most, I have done nothing."

"Are you a good judge?" she answered. "I know what you mean; Evelyn has told me. I think she was mistaken. I speak as an old woman who has known much trouble and sorrow, and seen more. My dear Mr. Glynn, your friend is a better man than he could ever have been without this trial. You have taken nothing from him; you have given



him much he never could have known. You have *not* failed."

Evelyn came in now, and, after supper, went to the piano and played to them. While she was playing, Mrs. Grey softly left the room. The music was a movement from one of Beethoven's sonatas; grand and stirring, yet with that subtle undercurrent of melancholy that runs through all the master's greatest music. When the piece ended, John rose.

"That has done me good, all the good in the world."

She looked up at him, touching the keys.

"Do you know, I always pictured you as one to whom music would never appeal."

"Why?"

He was leaning on the piano now, and something in his tone made her lower her eyes.

"I thought you had—what shall I call it—too little sensibility; I thought your hard life had hardened your nature. I do not think so now."

She spoke softly, lingering over the last words, a quaint smile hovering about her lips.

John drew nearer still, and dropped one hand until it closed on hers.

"I must speak now. I love you. That was why I went away. Shall I go again?"

He felt the fingers move within his own; he felt her head droop against his arm; and when he knelt, so that he might look into her face, she answered softly, "If you went away again, you would kill me, John."

THE END



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